

THE '*BESTLI*' OUTLAW: WILDERNESS AND EXILE IN OLD AND MIDDLE  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

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THE 'BESTLI' OUTLAW: WILDERNESS AND EXILE IN OLD AND MIDDLE  
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This dissertation, *The 'Bestli' Outlaw: Wilderness and Exile in Old and Middle English Literature* explores the reasons for the survival of the beast-like outlaw, a transgressive figure who highlights tensions in normative definitions of human and natural, which came to represent both the fears and the desires of a people in a state of constant negotiation with the land they inhabited. Although the outlaw's shelter in the wilderness changed dramatically from the dense and menacing forests of Anglo-Saxon England to the bright, known, and mapped greenwood of the late outlaw romances and ballads, the outlaw remained strongly animalistic, other, and liminal, in strong contrast to premodern notions of what it meant to be human and civilized. I argue that outlaw narratives become particularly popular and poignant at moments of national political and ecological crisis – as they did during the Viking attacks of the Anglo-Saxon period, the epoch of intense natural change following the Norman Conquest, and the beginning of the market revolution at the end of the Middle Ages. Figures like the Anglo-Saxon resistance fighter Hereward, the exiled Marcher lord Fulk Fitz Waryn, and the brutal yet courtly Gamelyn and Robin Hood, represent a lost

England imagined as pristine and forested. At the same time, their brutality points to a deep literary ambivalence towards the wilderness and the animal.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah Harlan-Haughey is a fourth-generation Montanan, born in Missoula to a family of farmers, musicians, and artists. She earned her undergraduate degrees in English and Spanish Literature at the University of Montana, and her Master's and Doctoral degrees in Medieval Literature at Cornell University. She is the CLAS Honors Preceptor of Medieval English at the University of Maine.

Dedicated to all the heroic (and, of course, wild) men in my life. I love you all:  
John, David, Bruce, Dale, David, Robert, Stephen, Jim, and *in memoriam* James,  
Walter, and Dusty, giants among men. Most of all, to my dear husband Justin,  
without whose support I would never have survived this process.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>FFW</i>	<i>Fouke Le Fitz Waryn</i>
<i>GH</i>	<i>Gesta Herewardi</i>
<i>GRH</i>	<i>Gest of Robin Hood</i>
<i>HDE</i>	<i>Histoire Des Engleis</i>
<i>HRB</i>	<i>Historia Regum Britanneae</i>

## PREFACE

Fowles in the frith,  
The fisshes in the flood,  
And I mon waxe wood  
Much sorwe I walke with  
For beste of boon and blood.<sup>1</sup>

That is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees  
— Those dying generations — at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
Monuments of unaging intellect.<sup>2</sup>

Laurence Buell, in *The Environmental Imagination*, discusses one of the problems with a human-centered literary criticism: “When an author undertakes to imagine someone else’s imagination of a tree, while sitting, Bartleby-like, in a cubicle with no view, small wonder that the tree seems to be nothing more than a textual function and one comes to doubt that the author could have fancied otherwise.”<sup>3</sup> In this project, I try to imagine the creation of this body of medieval nature writing by poets and storytellers on the ground, who mean tree when they say tree; there is not such a wall separating them from the elemental forces they live with, or at least, theirs is no air-conditioned office in a university. So while their fictional outlaws may be more engaged with their environments than the poets

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from Maxwell Luria and Richard Lester Hoffman, eds., *Middle English Lyrics* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1974), 55.

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium,” *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 191.

<sup>3</sup> Laurence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, nature writing, and the formation of American culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 5.

telling the story, those poets are closer to the outlaws' world than to ours, and their language about nature is not as distanced, in general. The commonplaces of outlawry – the greenwood, the waste, the fens, the town, the tower, are all present, and yes, they are generically recognizable, and often repeated from text to text. But yet, each landscape of each outlaw is unique, and specific to his unique characteristics and bioregion.

Barry Lopez' essay on "Landscape and Narrative" in *Crossing Open Ground*, as well as Leslie Marmon Silko's on "Landscape, History, and Pueblo Imagination" has given voice to what I have always felt; that the way we think is fundamentally influenced by our interior understanding of the landscapes we grew up with, which we know and feel in our bones. Consider the Middle English poet's fowles in the frith, his fisshes in the flood – these alliterative pairs, in their telegraphic power, give a sense of great world of order, of an ecosystem, for which these coupled images are but a stand-in, and their very assonance invokes a sense of fullness and rightness. Although the invocation of landscape is succinct, it is powerful – I am reminded of another poem, which does something similar, six centuries later:

The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees  
– Those dying generations – at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.

In a few more lines, and with quite a bit more envious judgment, but in the same set of images – a network of waterways and oceans teeming with mating fish, and

a treescape similarly coursing with avian life — W.B. Yeats summons up a whole ecosystem, and arguably, a whole island of animal activity. For in both poems, although the birds and the fishes ostensibly occupy their own specific habitats, their mention in tandem makes the audience aware of a deeper interconnectedness, of which the ambulant, thinking speaker is aware but not a part. Both speakers of both poems situate themselves as knowledgeable observers of this natural exuberance, somehow outside of the systems they are admiring. Let us turn again specifically to the Middle English poem.

The speaker begins with what looks to be a rhythmic catalogue of creation, but pulls up short with an intrusive interpolation of selfhood, in a sort of shocking contrast to the flowing description he has set up of fowls and fishes: “and I mon waxe wod.” The human speaker is not happy; he is not part of a harmonious song of creation. He is mad, or he is conscious that he must go mad, which is certainly one of the most maddening feelings in the world. Waxing in Middle English is not just connected with the lunar cycle as it is in its one vestigial use in Modern English, but it does have the same sense of a sort of natural event which involves a change in state — one can wax wroth or wax wod (note the alliteration in both of these common collocations). Wood can also wax up, as a tree grows. Analogously, a child can wax to adulthood. There is a double meaning or at least a landscape pun imbedded in this deceptively simple rhyme, for the word ‘wod’ sounds like the Middle English word ‘wood’ — and in the related literary traditions of Nebuchadnezzar, the wild man, the hermit, and the

exile, woods are associated with madness, and the homophone is strengthened by use and association. So although on the surface level the speaker means he must go mad, hidden behind that very word is his new habitat, the wood. He is in the wood now, we assume, as he observes the harmonious natural behavior of the other creatures.

Not only is this statement of disturbed self-awareness intrusive, a 2+2=5 moment after the soothing description of the mating creatures, but it is opposed to the placed-ness of the creatures previously mentioned. Where those animals inhabited a specific habitat, and were catalogued perhaps specifically for the comfort which thinking of their ease in habitat brings their human observer, the human subject is outside of a human context and ambulatory: “much sorwe I walke with for beste of boon and blood.” He has no place to rest—he wanders in his deep sorrow for some loss of the best of bone and blood. In this line a triple ambiguity is introduced. This last line literally means ‘for the best of bone and blood,’ so we know the creature the speaker mourns is, or was, a living entity; we assume a human being. The first solution most readers would think of is the end of a love-relationship—the speaker has lost the best thing in his life, and has gone mad from sorrow. Drawing attention to the internal systems of this lost beloved functions effectively as a *memento mori*, an object of meditation on the reality of the death of the human body. The second solution to the riddle comes in the reader’s momentary confusion: does the speaker mean beast? Beast and best are yet another Middle English pair which pushes the human drama of this poem

firmly into the realm of the natural. Finally, as we project our minds into a medieval mindset, the best of bone and blood suggests himself as a solution to an implicit riddle; the best of bone and blood is Jesus Christ, of course.

But the solution to the riddle will not hold. The ambivalence of the diction, the protean syntax, make one's mind dwell on the natural world invoked in this poem, on the human misery which becomes somehow part of the landscape itself, in spite of the alienated self's attempts to separate himself from his natural surroundings and perhaps move towards the consolation of religion. Ultimately the "beste of boon and blood" reinscribes a natural landscape into the closing line of the poem, as the human body is described as a landscape of sorts with rocks (the bone) creating specific places and rivers (blood) – coursing through it, bringing life and vitality to all the parts. And thus the poem comes full circle, leading us back to the opening: fowles in the frith, fisshes in the flood in analogy to the bones and blood. And so on it goes. This is one of the most perfectly circular poems. Its combination of alliteration and rhyme, its slightly off-putting five line stanza, its double and triple, even quadruple entendres, all are deeply satisfying in a dark way yet in the end absolutely mystifying. It is a cipher within a cipher, and everything it reveals conceals something beyond it.

The rhythm of this poem – I almost want to call it a chant – is infectious. Once memorized, it quickly establishes itself as a walking mantra, coming to one at times when one is swinging one's arms, moving about at an andante pace, and there it is, in its insidious singsong: 1,2,3,4, 1,2,3,4, 1,2,3,4, 1,2,3,4, and then back to

the beginning! It is a walking song, a little snippet one sings to oneself when walking outside, which explains its fragmentary nature, its seeming ephemerality. This also explains its exceptional multivalence; it can function as a prayer to God, an aid to enjoying nature, a piece for meditating on the complexity of the human condition, a way of singing the blues, or just a mindless walking song. In its ambiguity, its disturbing ambivalence and enigmatic musing on the life cycles of beast and man, it is powerful and hypnotic.

The melancholy of *Fowles in the Frith*, the paradoxical sense of connectedness and distance from the mechanics of the natural landscape, and of exile in one's own imperfect body: this is the mood of the English outlaw tradition as I unfold it in these pages. Stories of outlaws are elemental, disturbing, fabulous, and beautiful, full of wonder in and terror of the natural world and its inhabitants. As much as I have tried to avoid sitting "Bartleby-like" in my office while writing this study, surely there will be moments when I fail to convey the power and the aesthetic beauty, even the sublimity, of many of these neglected works. But these qualities are there, and they are worth looking for.

-April 10, 2011, Ithaca New York

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### *The Aims of this Study*

This dissertation traces fictional representations of the bestial outlaw – the exiled human who is portrayed as animalistic – as a means of understanding the shifting literary depiction of nature in medieval England.<sup>1</sup> It explores the reasons for the tenacious survival of the outlaw figure that came to represent the fears and the desires of a people in a state of constant negotiation with the land they inhabited. Although his shelter in the wilderness changed dramatically from the dense and menacing forests of Anglo-Saxon England to the bright, known, and mapped greenwood of the late Middle English outlaw legend, the outlaw remained strongly animalistic, other, and liminal, in strong contrast to contemporary notions of what it meant to be human and civilized.

Fundamentally, this study examines the outlaw in the wilderness as a transgressive figure who highlights tensions and ambiguity in normative definitions of the human and the natural. This study finds that outlaw narratives become particularly popular and poignant at moments of national crisis – for example, during the Viking attacks in the Anglo-Saxon period, during the intense natural

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<sup>1</sup> In spite of obvious and unfortunate connotative problems with the word ‘bestial’ to describe the outlaw behavior I explore in this study, I have kept the adjective, since I feel it does best encapsulate the characteristics most important to the study.



change in the years following the Norman Conquest, and during the market revolution at the end of the Middle Ages. The Anglo-Saxon resistance fighter Hereward, the exiled Marcher lord Fulk Fitz Waryn, the moribund representative of the manorial order Gamelyn, and Robin Hood, the nostalgic icon of a remembered forest, among others, stand for an imagined wild England, and at the same time, represent a belief in the brutality of nature that points to a deep literary ambivalence about the role of the wilderness.

In spite of the imposition of political meaning and timely commentary on the outlaw narrative, the specific motifs in their sense of place, in their exuberant violence, and in their deep sense of tragedy resist and elude this meaning-giving process. They resist personalization and in their conservative reaching-back to other outlaw contexts, create a nexus of nature and violence which is as complex as any simple political or propagandistic message. Even though the outlaw narratives may crop up at times of political crisis, and often serve as a message-giving mode, their bone structure is apolitical. They owe no allegiance to anything but the land. And the land is as specific as the outlaw narratives are general. Each story we will explore presents a focused vision of the English landscape. In particular, this study explores outlaw narratives which focus on two specific landscapes: the north of England, and the Welsh Marches. Both of these places are frontier lands, *between* spaces that are similarly difficult to categorize, and function as uneasy locations of a lot of political and ecological anxiety. So in a way many of the outlaw narratives are regional stories told about natural areas of cultural and political volatility – the marches and

the Danelaw. But the outlaw narratives resist even this categorization in the end, because their deep structure is folkloric, and it exists in tension with the specific, resulting in a deep and powerful paradox inherent in the tradition. Thus we must remain cautious about tracing particular political appropriations of the literature, not only because such studies have been done before, but also because the poetry itself has a distinct "wildness" that has a kind of natural force of its own.

The next chapter introduces the typical poetic associations of the outlaw with the natural world in Medieval English literature. The bestial outlaw inhabits natural space against his will and is portrayed ambiguously as both human and beast. A paradox, he contradicts the categorization of being by representing the oppositions – as well as the mergings – of human and animal. The third chapter identifies bestial exiles or outlaws in Anglo-Saxon literature as examples of a complex cluster of ideas and motifs concerned with the exiled human in nature that will be inherited by later tradition. Analysis of *Wulf and Eadwacer* demonstrates the ambiguity of the exiled outlaw/bestial figure, and how subjects of poetry about exile are often kept in a specifically liminal, pathetic position. Finally, analysis of the mirroring of wolves and outsiders in the prose *Life of St. Edmund* reveals how important questions of habitat and 'natural' behavior influence the way we read the wolfish outlaw in Old English. In Chapter Four, a close reading of the characterization of exiled Nebuchadnezzar and the exile-like Mermidonians in *Andreas* and *Daniel* shows that, in contrast to the more sympathetic treatment of exile in other poems like *Wulf and Eadwacer*, these biblical poems depict human beings

outside of Christian law with language that emphasizes their demonically wolfish nature. These chapters point to a certain ‘controlled’ attitude towards bestial outlawry, which tries to force these wild motifs into stylized and approachable packages. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Saxon poetry of outlawry often contains a sympathy with chaos and entropy which is a result of the almost organic burgeoning of the outlaw morphology.

These Anglo-Saxon depictions of outlaws as beasts inhabiting hostile wilderness shape later portrayals of the English bestial outlaw, which proliferate after the Norman Conquest. Chapter Five examines the popular 12<sup>th</sup> C. narrative of the Anglo-Saxon rebel Hereward as an early example of the bestial outlaw, a character that became increasingly popular because it provided a useful way of thinking about the significance yet changeability of the land, of the power of raw nature over ‘civilizing’ processes, and the options for resistance to this change. The story of Hereward best illustrates how the marginalization of Anglo-Saxons and the Norman assertion of colonial power shifted the power balance within the English landscape. During this period, the movement of and interactions between Norse, Norman, and English populations gradually blurred regional literary motifs into an English resistance narrative with the bestial outlaw – Hereward in this case – as its main protagonist. The literary outlaw was a subversive reaction to the colonial process of societal and natural conquest carried out on a grand scale by Norman conquerors and landlords that included deforestation, razing of fertile land, and large-scale hunts of alpha predators. But in spite of this obvious political and natural

commentary, the outlawed figure is monstrous, unwieldy, and glorious, and behaves in a manner which often unsettles any specific political or even ecological argument.

Chapter Six examines a hero of Anglo-Norman and Middle English romance – Fulk Fitz Waryn – who displays marked aspects of the bestial outlaw tradition identified in Chapter One, and shows how widespread and characteristic the outlaw story became. Fulk Fitz Waryn, like Hereward, represents the kind of political liminality and violence which often leads to outlaw narratives. A Norman lord on the Welsh borderlands who finds himself outlawed repeatedly due to his resistance to royal power, he is repeatedly compared to, or becomes the companion of, animals and bestial humans. Like Hereward, Fulk Fitz Waryn is a very complex romance hero, at times bestial and at others magisterial, pointing to the unease and protean shiftings which are intrinsic to the outlaw narratives.

Chapter Seven follows the bestial outlaw to his final flowering in the Middle Ages – the greenwood ballads of Gamelyn and Robin Hood – and shows how the figure had been both intensified and diluted by changes in the English landscape and its imaginary representation. The extinction of major alpha predators (previously used as a comparison to the bestial outlaws' behavior) and the social nature of most of the late-medieval outlaws' activities problematized the identification of human with predator – the outlaw as wolf was previously a standard simile used in outlaw texts – and led to the introduction of another bestial metaphor: the master-hart and his herd. The change of animal simile resulted in

some extraordinarily paradoxical imagery; within a few lines, Robin Hood can be depicted as a courtly gentleman, a ravening wolf, and a hunted deer. This metaphorical ambiguity points to a dissonance in literary understandings of the meanings and value of wilderness itself.

Tracing the generic category of 'bestial outlaw' illustrates the dramatic changes in the imagined literary wilderness throughout the medieval period. The dismal, horrific, haunted waste of Anglo-Saxon exile poetry looks very different from the sunny, cheerful Greenwood of the late medieval outlaw ballads, but the outlaw figure himself remains fairly constant in portrayal. He is consistently characterized as brutal, rapacious, and doomed – in analogy with the predators to which he is often compared. This survey of the complex interactions between this standard literary figure and his changing habitat, which unsettles the more standard political or historical readings of the outlaw literature, is an important addition to the field of outlaw studies and to ecocritical studies of the Middle Ages.

A chronological survey of this figure as a means of understanding changing attitudes towards nature turns up very interesting questions. For example, if the exiled figure is consistently portrayed from the Anglo-Saxon period to the end of the Middle English period as bestial and brutal, why are these narratives so different in their tone towards wild spaces? Why is the late medieval Greenwood such a delightful, relatively open park full of deer and birds, while the lonely wilderness inhabited by the exiles of Anglo-Saxon poetry seems bleak, empty of positive meaning, and actively dangerous? This work aims to answer this question through

an exploration of changing poetic traditions, changing English landscapes, and differing opinions about the value and meaning of wilderness itself. Finally, however, it concludes that the real narrative force lies in the complexity of the bestial outlaw motifs.

In spite of the imposition of political meaning and timely commentary on the outlaw narrative, the specific motifs in their sense of place, in their exuberant violence, and in their deep sense of tragedy resist and elude this meaning-giving process. They resist personalization and in their conservative reaching-back to other outlaw contexts, create a nexus of nature and violence which is as complex as any simple political or propagandistic message. Even though the outlaw narratives may crop up at times of political crisis, and often serve as a message-giving mode, their bone structure is apolitical. They owe no allegiance to anything but the land. And the land is as specific as the outlaw narratives are general. Each story we will explore presents a focused vision of the English landscape.

### ***Orienting This Study***

Many medievalists have done nature-oriented studies of literature which explore medieval concepts of wilderness — Neville, Salisbury, Pluskowski, Yamamoto, Siewers, Semple, Overing, Lees, and many others have provided models for a kind of study of medieval material that looks *for* the natural, not *through* it—

and their studies have inspired and influenced this work.<sup>2</sup> To a certain extent following their useful examples I use the outlaw not as an end in himself, an object of study, but rather as a means of exploring the ways in which these outlaw narratives engage wilderness and nature on their own terms. Shifting the focus from a human-oriented study to a nature-oriented one is a move these and other scholars have made successfully, and I hope to do the same in this study.<sup>3</sup>

While many previous studies of medieval wild men, madmen, monsters, and other dwellers in the margins have been written, and their explorations of these figures' liminality have helped us interrogate the perceived interstices between the

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Aleksander Pluskowski's *Wolves and Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), which has heavily influenced my reading of the animalistic elements of the bestial outlaw figure as well as my understanding of the actual ecology of the European wolf in the Middle Ages; Joyce E. Salisbury's *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1994), which reads all sorts of different aspects of the animal/human relationship in the middle ages; Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles, eds., *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), an interdisciplinary exploration of medieval landscape; Barbara Hanawalt and Michael Kobialka's theoretically-grounded *Medieval practices of space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *A Place to Believe in: Locating Medieval Landscapes* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2006); John Howe and Michael Wolfe's study *Inventing medieval landscapes: senses of place in Western Europe* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002); Alfred K. Siewers' inspiring *Strange beauty: ecocritical approaches to early medieval landscape* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the natural world in Old English poetry* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Dorothy Yamamoto's *The boundaries of the human in medieval English literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). I have drawn upon and emulated many of these writers' approaches to landscape in this dissertation.

<sup>3</sup> Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter's *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973) and Penelope Doob's *Nebuchadnezzar's children: conventions of madness in Middle English literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) are inspiring examples of the iconographic approach, which looks at depictions of the natural world in the Middle Ages primarily as symbolic of human concerns. This more traditional – and absolutely valid – approach to landscape and nature in medieval literature has many great examples, such as Le Goff's well-known study of the forest in *Medieval Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

human and the 'wild' as more general imaginary categories, the outlaw is a very *placed* figure, who as a consequence of his political displacement often resides in very specific, non-generic, regional landscapes, unlike these other figures, who most commonly inhabit more generic 'wildernesses.'<sup>4</sup> The outlaw's more specific habitats and landscapes – in comparison with the other liminal figures like 'the wild man' with which he shares much common ground – are in part a result of the historicity of at least some of the outlaw figures; a real rebel named Hereward actually did take refuge in the Fenland of East Anglia, and the Fitz Waryns really were Marcher lords. As a result the histories and poems narrating their stories often engage directly with the woodland, parks, and bogs they inhabit, and the topography can become quite specific at times, central to the dramas of outlawry. The 'wild' in these outlaw narratives is a major player, influencing not only the outcome of the story, but the day-to-day habits and necessities of the exiled humans who inhabit it. When the wild becomes more generic, as it does both in the some of the Anglo-Saxon poems of exile and in the late medieval Robin Hood ballad material, this can motivate us to

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<sup>4</sup> For studies of wild men, see Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952); Edward Dudley and Maxmillian E. Novak, eds., *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972); D. A. Wells, *The Wild Man from the Epic of Gilgamesh to Hartmann von Aue's Iwein*, New Lecture Series Vol. 78, (Belfast: The Queen's University, 1975); Roger Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); and Penelope Doob's *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*. For monster studies, there is a broad-ranging body of work, which would be very difficult to summarize here, but see: Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), and J.J. Cohen's work *Monster Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).



examine the narrative even closer, in order to understand why Robin Hood interacts with his environment in such a different way, or why we can't seem to get our bearings as to where that miserable exile in the Anglo-Saxon elegy *is*. Thus this study offers a more focused examination of the animalistic human figure within a more fully-realized landscape, and offers us a means of getting a little closer to understanding the way English poets and others really *imagined* their land. Ultimately, though, this perception of the actual landscape is always in dialogue with the folkloric language of exile common to the genre itself.

In a similar vein, studies of the outlaw 'tradition' have generally focused on the political circumstances, historicity, and other more human-centered aspects of what is basically a textual phenomenon—they read the outlaw poems and narratives for their human and political interest—The work of Holt, Keen, Pollard, Ohlgren, Knight and others have provided invaluable insight into the human circumstances of the production of the Robin Hood material in particular.<sup>5</sup> Those studies of the other outlaw literature which exist also focus on historicity of the figures. Examples of such studies are Cyril Hart's study of the figure of Hereward and Hathaway's

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<sup>5</sup> Five classic studies of the outlaw material are Maurice Keen's *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); J.C. Holt's *Robin Hood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982); Stephen Knight's *Robin Hood: a mythic biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); A.J. Pollard's *Imagining Robin Hood: the late-medieval stories in historical context* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Thomas Ohlgren's *Robin Hood: the early poems, 1465-1560: Texts, Contexts, and Ideology* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007).

edition and translation of Fouke le Fitz Waryn.<sup>6</sup> Other studies of specific texts have focused on their relationship to specific genres, for example Crane's analysis of Fulk Fitz Waryn's place within the context of the Anglo-Norman *Ancestral Romances*, Wright's analysis of Hereward within the context of saga, or the various investigations of the *Tale of Gamelyn's* relationship to the Chaucerian corpus. This study turns these traditional approaches upside down, drawing upon the previous work of these scholars but looking through the human aspects of the outlaw traditions that they have identified in order to get at the natural, the animal and the ecological, defined in terms of wilderness and the outlaw's place within it.

This study has also drawn upon the work of theorists of human/animal/natural interaction on a more universal level. Clive Polling's *New Green History of the World*, Robert Pogue Harrison's work on forests and on the spaces of the dead, and the synthesizing works of Jared Diamond have helped me put the ecological struggles depicted in these medieval English texts in a global perspective, and have offered an interdisciplinary model for theorizing the role of wilderness in this period in question, in terms of human interaction with landscape.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Victor Head, *Hereward* (London: Sutton Pub., 1995); Paul Dalton, "The Outlaw Hereward 'the Wake': His Companions and Enemies," in *Outlaws in medieval and early modern England: crime, government and society, c.1066-c.1600*, ed. Paul Dalton and John C. Appleby (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Clive Ponting, *A New Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007); Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests, The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Jared Diamond, *Collapse* (New York: Penguin, 2006) and his iconic *Guns Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999).

Nature writers Barry Lopez and David Quammen have helped me theorize the fraught relationships between farmers and townspeople, on the one hand and with wild humans and dangerous predators on the other, and I draw upon many of their insights within the following chapters.<sup>8</sup> Nature writers and philosophers of wilderness have also helped me contextualize this study. Gilles Deleuze, Lévi-Strauss, Heidegger, and Foucault have provided me with theoretical frameworks to help me construct my own thought about wilderness, space, and human understanding.<sup>9</sup> Such theorists of the American West as Leslie Marmon Silko, Richard Etulain, and Dan Flores, among others, have focused my understanding of the tense yet nebulously shifting boundary between the safe, human world, and the expansive, yet often terrifying 'other' that is the wilderness, however it may be imagined. Finally, I have drawn upon the systematizing and conceptualizing work of many critics of the environment and literature such as Cheryll Glotfelty, William

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, David Quammen, *Monster of God: The Man-Eating Predator in the Jungles of History and the Mind* (Boston: W.W. Norton and Co, 2004); and Barry Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze's theorizing of the meaning of 'empty' wilderness in his famous essay "Desert Islands" in *Desert islands and other texts, 1953-1974* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), has helped me focus my understanding of the human colonizing of wilderness or wild spaces. His organic readings of history as rhizomatic have helped structure my study of the uniquely rhizomatic growth of outlaw legend, as in Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004). Claude Lévi-Strauss' *The Raw and the Cooked* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) has helped me theorize the unusual food fixation of the outlaw narratives, and his *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963) has given me insight into the figuring of the outlaws as fundamentally animal, yet human at the same time. Foucault's work on the structure and space of power has helped me theorize the space of the natural in works that are ostensibly concerned with politics and social justice. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Psychology Press, 2001), and *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995).

Howarth, Lawrence Buell, Glen A. Love, and Joseph Meeker.<sup>10</sup> I will not dwell too long on these individual scholars here, as most will appear along the way in the body chapters of this study.

One of my anxieties in conducting this study is that the subject matter, a search for an English outlaw tradition, may be too rooted in outmoded concerns to be valuable. Looking for narrative conventions which remain constant over a vast and widely variable period of time *does* seem inspired by a certain kind of romantic Victorian scholarship now frowned upon by the academy. Certainly the subject matter itself, a search for an English tradition of depicting a bestial outlaw, is in some ways more like an older sort of project which looked for generalities and commonalities where modern scholarship searches for specifics, since I argue that the figure of the bestial outlaw remains unchanged in his broadest contours for the Anglo-Saxon period to the late Middle Ages. To a certain extent, I must simply bear this in mind. I also must cite Joe Harris' thoughtful rebuttal to those in the academy who would accuse such studies of being overly romantic: "There is a curious movement in our field today that find it easier to believe in the archaizing than in the archaic and an obscure, never fully expressed assumption that it is more realistic

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<sup>10</sup> See Joseph Meeker, *The comedy of survival: in search of an environmental ethic* (International College: Guild of Tutors Press, 1980); Glen A. Love, *Practical ecocriticism: literature, biology, and the environment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Lawrence Buell, *The future of environmental criticism: environmental crisis and literary imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); and Cheryll Glotfelty's "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, xv-xxxvii. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

(less “romantic”, a key term of opprobrium) to believe in recent fraud than that the oral centuries had a voice, that is, to believe in the existence of traditions.”<sup>11</sup>

But since my work explores the bestial outlaw’s status as a negotiator of the wild and focuses more on mapping a deep ambiguity about nature brought out by the figure, than any notion of its being some kind of romantic ‘noble savage,’ or some ur-Englishman, a national symbol which somehow epitomizes ‘Englishness,’ I hope I will keep it from falling too much in line with mythic history or projection. Also, my folkloric methodology is balanced by theoretical concerns which should ground each chapter in its immediate context. As I mentioned above, my work most draws upon ecocritical methodologies, which challenge any top-down meaning I can give the text, since they demand that I engage with each space, each habitat and wilderness in each poem or narrative based on its own merits, for as Robert Kern argued in his article “What is Ecocriticism good for,” reading texts ecologically provides us a toolkit for “reading against the grain...to recover the environmental character or orientation of works whose conscious or foregrounded interests lie elsewhere.”<sup>12</sup> The outlaw narratives, such a classic focus of human-oriented scholarship, yield, as we will see, very interesting results when read against the grain in such a way. In fact, I have come to believe that reading nature in the outlaw

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Harris, “Hadubrand's Lament: On the origin and age of elegy in Germanic,” in *Heldensage und Heldendichtung im Germanischen*, ed. H. Beck, 81-114 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 89-90.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Kern, “Ecocriticism – What Is It Good For?” *ISLE* 7, no. 1 (2000): 11.

narratives is not actually reading against the grain at all; nature is the *materia*, the very fabric of the stories told about exile and outlawry – the human and the political may be engraved on the surface, but the deep structure of the literary artifact is nature's own.

In order to further ground my study I have married several methodologies: folkloric (or perhaps mythic), philological, and ecocritical. My work is interdisciplinary, emulating the effective approach modeled by other ecocritics, who argue correctly that studies which aim to do justice to landscape in literature must take into account natural phenomena, other modes of perceiving the world, and the world itself, not just human interests and aesthetic qualities. This unified methodology marries older methods of philology and folklore with new and important theoretical concerns of ecocriticism and colonial theory, as well as material studies of Medieval English ecology, and thus unifies a large survey of outlaw literature from early Old English to late Middle English, an ambitious study to be sure.<sup>13</sup> Ecocriticism is a blanket term, in a way, since it encompasses in its very interdisciplinarity all the separate aspects of scholarship I draw together in this study. The ecocritic Glen A. Love argues that ecology is the fundamental science of our time and that ecocriticism is basically interdisciplinary and resists any kind of

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<sup>13</sup>Ecocriticism, "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature," is a word first coined by William Ruechert in 1978 in his study "Literature and ecology: an experiment in Ecocriticism," in Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 105-123.

monolithic banner or thought process. It is fundamentally an 'interface' discipline, which negotiates between art, philosophy, biology, politics, and many other concerns, bringing together seemingly disparate ways of knowing beneath a common banner, and helping expand the literary critic's horizon from the narrowly human to a whole universe of possibility.<sup>14</sup>

### *Transhistorical Comparison*

My work uses some of the methods used in critical explorations of the North American West as a symbol of a borderland, a place of exile, and a place of conflict between wilderness and civilization. Even a cursory survey of modern literature and news about the struggle against wolves, coyotes, mountain lions, and bears in the American West can remind one that wherever a borderland is perceived between 'wild' space and human habitations, there one finds legends, propaganda, and stories about the rapaciousness of wild animals, their danger to humankind, and in the reverse, the stories of humans who live in that dangerous space, who 'run' or 'dance' with wolves, who admirably, fearsomely, enviably, or monstrously leave behind the trappings of civilization, either by compulsion or choice, and become somehow *animal*. Although medieval evidence exists that suggests that wolves and outlaws were equated in early medieval law – an outlaw was a wolf and *vice versa* as far as the law was concerned, modern evidence suggests that wolves and other wild

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<sup>14</sup> Love, *Practical Ecocriticism*, 5-7.

canids will be equated with outlaws in any natural environment where both exist, and no reaching back to tradition is necessary, as it is an obvious comparison.<sup>15</sup> The equation is almost a biological one, for as long as we humans have purposely expelled wrongdoers and marginal people from our human worlds, and as long as we have battled against predators for our own sustenance, this equation has likely arisen in our minds. Both wolf and outlaw are wanted 'dead or alive' due to their depredations, and the danger they pose to civilization.

In the context of ecofeminism, Annette Kolodny marvels at "our continuing fascination with the lone male in the wilderness, and our literary heritage of essentially adolescent" stories about the same.<sup>16</sup> In a way, the medieval survival stories of the heroic, bestial outlaws tread similar paths to tales written by Robert Louis Stephenson, Jack London, and James Fennimore Cooper, as well as with other frontier narratives in their famous triangulation of conflict between outlaw (either white, or Native American) evil representative of the law, and good lawkeeper (our late medieval Sherriff of Nottingham, Good King, and Robin Hood structure). Moreover, theorists of the American West have been very busy over the past few decades giving names to and constructing ways of understanding border narratives.

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<sup>15</sup> Henry de Bracton, *Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England*, ed. George E. Woodbine, trans. Samuel E. Thorne (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968-77), 2: 354.

<sup>16</sup> Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 147.



So this study at times draws on the theorizing of analogous fictional structures in the American West.

Similarly, in its theorizing of topographic structures and the meaning of different kinds of landscape, this study draws to a certain extent on the ways of thinking first systematized by postcolonial theory, which helps us think about the ways literature differentiates between occupier and occupied, colonizer and colonized, and explores the structures of power and their depiction in literature and space. Postcolonial theory is useful for this project because it offers a methodology for exploring human constructions of space, national identity, conquest, violence, and colonial imaging of a conquered nation as other or subhuman. Medieval outlaw narratives are interesting in that they see forests and wilderness as spaces that are empty or unpeopled 'waste.' This is in spite of the fact that nearly all land in the Middle Ages was being used in some way or another – even the vast swathes of forest were used regularly as pannage, for various kinds of wood, and for animal 'storage.' Yet the literature of outlawry nearly always depicts a land unpeopled and unmanaged, ready for colonization by human effort, if only it were not held by the menacing human beasts in its dark depths. So, if Lefebvre is right and space is filled with ideology, the ideology of the medieval teller of tales was to describe a landscape that never was, which makes physical the tension between the wild and the tame, the human and the animal. The kinds of imaginings of self and other so mapped by postcolonial theory have always been present in English literature, from the very beginning. Before the imagination stretched to the ends of the earth, the

wild other dwelled much closer to home, in the forests and wastes of Western Europe. For Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poets, the wild was near at hand, in the imagined wilderness and untamed spaces of their own island. The frontier was inhabited by beasts and outlaws, these supremely liminal human creatures.<sup>17</sup> But more than anything else, this frontier was in their own mind, in the very fiber of their storytelling traditions, and in the deepest memories of their shared cultural heritage.

### *Concluding Remarks*

Studying the theme of the exile within nature within the broad span of English literature and oral tradition has allowed me to focus on texts which are not part of the narrowly-defined literary canon – many of the texts with which I am working are not deeply studied. The disadvantage is that they are not well-known, and often require a significant amount of summary in order to make critical points. Scholars have explored the theme of the outlaw within nature to a certain extent – this study sees the outlaw as a means of understanding nature and to that degree points to a new and to some extent, inchoate context of ecocriticism. Most of these deeply-embedded critical frameworks will not be apparent in the textual engagements of the following chapters. In the limited space and time of this already

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<sup>17</sup> See de Certeau on the outlaw as a 'frontier' human in Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 127.

perhaps [over-]ambitious study, only the *most* pertinent aspects of that analysis will be emphasized, cutting short many potential engagements with other critical work.

Ultimately, this study reads folklore as a biological force; such a rhizomatic, organically occurring morphology can express in certain situations and under certain pressure. Similarly, in a parallel development, poetic pleasure and creativity in these narratives comes from a state of receptivity to two great and related influences: the folkloric morphology of the outlaw, and the natural environment, or a sense of place. The writing of outlaw is ultimately a natural experience; the outlaw is an aesthetic creation above all else, an almost biological reaction to an intersection or collision of human and natural forces. Our task, then, lies in entering into the sensuous atmosphere of the poetry, gaining a sense of the internal power, which resists, to a certain extent, contextual power.

As we noted in the preface to this study when we saw that the fowles in the frith and the fishes in the flood inhabited a specific habitat, and were catalogued perhaps specifically for the comfort which thinking of their ease in habitat brings their human observer, the human subject is outside of a human context and ambulatory: “much sorwe I walke with for beste of boon and blood.” He has no place to rest—he wanders in his deep sorrow for some loss of the best of bone and blood. The outlaw literature responds to that pain in a unique way, in a nostalgia that goes past the individual or even the epochal. It is a restlessness, a sense of loss, and an urging towards the wild and the lyric in spite of a superficial political agenda which gives these melancholy stories and poems their power.

In “the domain of the outlaw,” Foucault identified a place of sanctuary for seemingly unrelated undesirable rejects of mainstream society: “there poverty, unemployment, pursued innocence, cunning, the struggle against the powerful, the refusal of obligations and laws, and organized crime all came together as chance and fortune could dictate; it was the domain of adventure that Gil Blas, Sheppard or Mandarin, each in his own way, inhabited.”<sup>18</sup> This motley assortment of abstract qualities is appealing in its very heterogeneity, its lack of reconcilability. In this borderland lurks the mythic outlaw, as Foucault famously goes on to say: “The lyricism of marginality may find inspiration in the image of the “outlaw,” the great social nomad, who prowls on the confines of a docile, frightened order.”<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault speaks of the lyricism of the outlaw. What does it mean to say that this figure is lyric? I imagine in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault is simply referring to the emotional appeal of the outlawed figure, which ultimately results in the accretion of public momentum and power to the figure until his resistance is ultimately co-opted into a vast culture movement, all as a result of his appeal to the feelings of the individual. But the use of the word lyricism is apt in more ways than this, for outlaw literature is also lyric in a generic sense. Arguably, the outlaw tradition is in tune with the medieval lyric tradition, from *Wulf and Eadwacer* on; and as lyrics are fundamentally unclassifiable, emotive, aesthetic, individualistic, and often apolitical,

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<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 300.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

so is the outlaw tradition, even though it may appear to be the opposite of all these things at first glance. It presents us with a unique mode of looking at the world which is far removed from dominant modes of interpretation, which resists meaning-making, and yet is organically, almost genetically composed of building blocks of information, a folkloric morphology which, like DNA, shapes the narratives into the strange yet powerful creatures they are.

In this paradox lies the greatest marvel of the outlaw tradition. For as individual authors or traditions react to political and environmental stimuli, they produce unique compositions which are yet in deeper harmony with an almost organic folklore; it need not seem overly deterministic in a bad way; we can look at this creative process as harmonizing in a unique way with natural processes – the human individual creates something special, which is still part of a great tradition of evolution and survival – the genes of the bestial outlaw, or perhaps the virus of the story, is carried from host to host, and replicates its basic features in an endless process of poetic recomposition and aesthetic appreciation.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BESTLI OUTLAW IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND: AN OVERVIEW

The lyricism of marginality may find inspiration in the image of the "outlaw," the great social nomad, who prowls on the confines of a docile, frightened order.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Defining the Outlaw*

Recently, a scholar stumbled across a reference to Robin Hood in the *Polychronicon* that was previously unnoticed. Dr. Julian Luxford's discovery made international headlines with the news that Robin Hood was not as popular as previously assumed. An article entitled "Hood not so Good" in the AP said: "An academic says he's found evidence that Britain's legendary outlaw Robin Hood wasn't as popular as folklore suggests. Julian Luxford says a note discovered in the margins of an ancient history book contains rare criticism of the supposedly benevolent bandit."<sup>21</sup> In a BBC article, Dr. Luxford, the discoverer of the new evidence, said, "The new find contains a uniquely negative assessment of the outlaw, and provides rare evidence for monastic attitudes towards him."<sup>22</sup> As exciting as this discovery of the earliest-known chronicle reference to Robin Hood may be, the surprise of the press at Robin Hood's being seen as anything short of a hero does not

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>21</sup> David Stringer, "Hood not so Good? Ancient Brits Questioned Outlaw," *Seattle Times*, March 14, 2009. Accessed July 12, 2010. <http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/...>

<sup>22</sup> "Negative Attitude to Robin Hood," *BBC News*, March 14, 2009. Accessed July 12, 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/...> For Luxford's original account, see Julian M. Luxford, "An English Chronicle Entry on Robin Hood," *Journal of Medieval History* 35, no. 1 (2009): 70-76.

take the earliest literature about the outlaw into account. Those familiar with the Robin Hood of medieval tradition know that he was not a wholly sympathetic figure. The earliest ballads depict Robin Hood as a dangerous, unpredictable, even feral figure who is as capable of harming as helping. Of course, Luxford was not responsible for the sensationalism of the press, so we must not hold him responsible for these inaccuracies. This ambiguity is the result of Robin Hood's heritage as a literary outlaw, a class of figures who inhabit a liminal space between human and animal and tend to evoke markedly mixed feelings in their audience. This liminality, in conjunction with the fact of the outlaws' occupation of the wilds, places of terror and fantasy to medieval (and modern) people, results in a class of figures who are complex, to say the least.

We can intuit this perhaps universal association of outlaws with animal behavior, but a cursory look at our own popular culture shows how deeply ingrained this concept is even today. Three particularly salient representative examples would be Western outlaw movies like *Jeremiah Johnson*, where the hero becomes more monstrous and bearlike the further he disappears into the wilderness, figures like Bigfoot, who are humanlike but wild and live away from society like beasts, and, of course, the Disney portrayal of Robin Hood as a cartoon fox either intuitively or consciously draws upon this deep tradition of portraying outsiders as 'lone wolves,' or at any rate, lone canids. In a mirror image of this common animalizing reaction to outlaws, top carnivores are often anthropomorphized in the image of outlaws, an interesting move considering the fact that many top predators

are actually very social animals, with complex societies all their own, and that they are at the top of the food chain, not outlaws at all within the natural order, but rather, central to the organic processes of life on earth. Examples of this would be nature documentaries of real wild wolves like that of David Attenborough, which describes them as “Legendary Outlaws,” and the current debate in many Western states in the USA over the reintroduction of wolves into their native habitat, in which the rhetoric of debate often portrays the beasts as malicious humans capable of a kind of murderous reason that impels them to seek out the livestock of hardworking farmers.<sup>23</sup>

This dissertation is an ecocritical study of the figure of the bestial outlaw as it appears specifically in the medieval English narrative tradition, from early Anglo-Saxon to late Middle English. Studies of outlaw poetry have long been the province of historians, who continue to debate the political agenda and the audience of a fairly disparate group of poems and tales, but few literary critics have studied outlaw narratives as literature, analyzing their themes and aesthetics as objects of study in themselves. Although medieval English poets characterize human outlaws variably as heroes or villains, the poetic identification of the human exile with the beasts with which he shares his habitat – in particular wolves and deer – remains constant. Examination of the ways in which this poetic tradition evolves in tandem

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<sup>23</sup> David Attenborough et al., “Wolf, Legendary Outlaw,” disc 2, *David Attenborough Wildlife Specials*, directed by David Attenborough (London?: BBC Video, 2008), DVD.



with the changing landscape of England and the changing shape of English society, i.e. as forests grew smaller and human populations bigger (this process, of course, comes to an abrupt end with the advent in the 1350's of the Black Plague), provides an effective means of tracing shifts in human attitudes toward the environment and its animal inhabitants. Each chapter examines specific narratives individually and then maps them within the chronological development of the narrative tradition of bestial outlawry. The outlaw generally inhabits natural space against his will and is portrayed ambiguously as human and beast, often at the same time. He is thus a paradox who contradicts the categorization of being, and who represents the oppositions and intersections of the human and the animal. Because he is paradoxical, his narratives resist critical interpretation – the wildness slips away from meaning.

I begin this study with an example of a late medieval outlaw narrative in ballad form, which demonstrates almost all the traits of the medieval bestial outlaw tradition as a whole. I have included the ballad of “Johny Cock” in its entirety in Appendix A. “Johny Cock” is a particularly strange Scottish ballad, and although it was recorded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was probably composed in the late medieval period. It sings of an outlaw, a man who must wear a cloak of green to blend in with the forest and to avoid capture. He must forsake the company of humans and live in the wild with the dogs who are his sole companions in the wilderness. This ballad provides us with good examples of many of the most

fundamental elements of the entire bestial outlaw tradition as it manifested in the British Isles, so I will open with an analysis of it.

We begin to learn things about “Johnny Cock” – the outlaw-protagonist of this ballad – in the typical ballad fashion; incremental repetition of telling details and omission of important narrative threads both invite the hearer into the tale and reinforce a sense of mystery and ambiguity. When we meet Johnny, he is wearing ostentatious red garments, suggestive of both blood and nobility, but when his mother reminds him of the seven foresters chasing him, he refuses to hide in the comfort of his mother’s home. Instead, as if compelled by some magnetic attraction to the woods (or as if he is fated to die) he throws off his civilized clothes in favor of the late medieval outlaw’s uniform, the Lincoln green, which both camouflages him in his habitat as he hides in “a buss o’ broom” and makes him seem part of nature, not civilization. In this outfit he joins the great medieval tradition of green-wearing, standing among the ranks of Robert the Bruce, Robin Hood, and even the Green Men like Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Beyond the identification with other ‘green men’, the green garb marks him as a creature of the forest, not of civilization. Although green was historically the livery of the forester, as we famously see in Chaucer’s prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, where the Knight’s Yeoman appears clad in green, Johnny is emphatically *not* a forester. He wears green for the simple reason that it marks him as a forest-dweller and a wild human, because this has become, by the late medieval period, the most effective shorthand for immediately calling up in the audience’s mind an entire category of creatures

who live in the wild and wear green – fairies, ghosts, foresters, wild men, devils, and outlaws. But many other characteristics Johnny displays will narrow his categorization as an outlaw and nothing else, at least as far as we can distinguish between these categories of being, which, as we shall see, are prone to slippage. This kind of slippage is exactly the kind of thing that make it very difficult for the outlaw narratives to provide any sort of unified political commentary, as we will see.

### *The Problem of Food*

Terrified of the consequences of his capture should he leave his hideout, Johnny's distraught mother offers him cooked food that he rejects in favor of raw venison, which he brings down in a hunt and shares with his dogs in a savage feast: "he has taen out of that dun deer / The liver bot and the tongue. / They eat of the flesh, and they drank of the blood, / And the blood it was so sweet, / Which caused Johnny and his bloody hounds / To fall in a deep sleep." The gift to the dogs of the liver and the tongue are not unusual, but rather form part of the formal hunting ritual practiced by medieval hunters. But Johnny's devouring of the raw deer flesh and blood certainly is beyond the normal scope of ritualistic hunting behavior! Johnny and his companions are so gluttoned with this raw feast that they sink into a deep slumber, which results in their capture. This detail betrays both a knack for naturalism on the part of the ballad creators – it is based on real-life observation of predators in the wild, who do tend to sleep after feasting – and an unstated equivalence of Johnny with such wild predators. This is a startling and disturbing

series of actions, narrated in the striking and value-neutral style that gives ballads their unique power. The ballad passes no judgment, for example, on the human's drinking of the blood, and even, in a positive and participatory move, describes that blood as 'sweet.' The audience, perhaps, was not surprised by this brutal feast; they may have expected Johnny to behave like a wild beast because, to them, that is simply the sort of thing literary outlaws do, and have always done. It is indeed common for early modern traditional balladry to strike such a neutral tone even towards the most monstrous of protagonists, but medieval romance literature tends to pass judgement on such behavior. Interestingly, the medieval outlaw tradition presents all sorts of deviant behavior in a strikingly similar neutral tone, again, making political affiliation with outlaw figures problematic.

From this savage sharing of raw food with dogs, it is a short logical leap to cannibalism, the ultimate food taboo, for once one is able to devour bloody flesh, one has lost inhibitions concerning food. Concerns about the exile's sharing food with animals and even engaging in hideous cannibalistic feasts are prominent features of Old English literature, and these concerns continue to propel outlaw narratives throughout the medieval centuries all the way to these late-medieval ballads, with their fixation on food.<sup>24</sup> Johnny Cock eats raw meat with his dogs, many Robin Hood

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<sup>24</sup> For the classic discussion of the blood-taboo in Anglo-Saxon literature and thought, see Fred C. Robinson's "Lexicography and Literary Criticism: a Caveat," in *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Literature in Honor of Herbert Dean Meritt*, ed. James L. Rosier (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 102-103.

ballads fixate on the sublimated violence in overblown feast scenes, and uncouth outlaw heroes like Hereward, Gamelyn, and Fulk Fitz Waryn repeatedly break taboos against mixing raw human blood with their meals when they bleed on their plates or tables and insist on continuing their feasts.

Reminding his readers of the realities of the outlaw life in medieval England, Maurice Keen points out the fact that the late outlaw ballads “exult in bloodshed.” Human corpses are mutilated beyond recognition, people lose limbs and digits, innocents are slaughtered by the ‘hero’, and women are subjected to violence:

The streak of class violence which runs through all the stories of Robin Hood and the other outlaws is perhaps their most striking feature...In the ballads we are up against a full-blooded medieval brigand, who, even if his conduct is redeemed by courtly generosity to the poor and deserving, is a brigand nevertheless and can be called by no other name. He is a desperate man, and he has recourse to desperate and violent remedies. It will not do to forget this, for if one does one will forget what an outlaw really was.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, even a short survey of the medieval outlaw literature precludes the possibility of forgetting what an outlaw really was. He was a creature of the wastes, a companion of the wild beasts, and like them, he preyed upon the goods, chattel, and persons of the law-abiding citizenry. And when he could not get his hands on the property of other humans, he was forced to forage like an animal must. The importance of this cannot be overstated, as it provides us with the key to understanding the ambiguities of attitude in the Middle Ages towards the outlaw. A

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<sup>25</sup> Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 3.

person who shares meat or grain with an animal necessarily suffers a reduction in his humanity. In Giraldus Cambrensis' critical account of the Irish, he notes that the Irish did not grow much food, instead living primarily on meat and milk products of their pastoral animals. Gerald of Wales seems disgusted by this diet: "they live on beasts only, and live like beasts."<sup>26</sup> From this comment we can deduce that a diet of flesh and dairy only somehow reduced a human to mere animality. For certainly, one of the characteristics that distinguishes humans from beasts is our ability to prepare food for ourselves through a ritual of gathering, cooking, presenting, and consuming.<sup>27</sup> An outlaw, with his diet of stolen deer and cattle, is thus reduced from a human to a beast by this fundamental cultural reality, as we can see quite clearly in Johnny Cock, who consciously denies his humanity by refusing his mother's offer of baked bread and wine in favor of raw flesh. It is interesting here to note that holy men who live in the woods are often depicted as subsisting on nuts and berries, while outlaws' diets of flesh are often a focus of their narratives. This is no coincidence; the hermits' vegetarian diet brings them closer to their creator and to an Edenic state, while the outlaws' fleshly one pushes them into the range of demonic, even cannibalistic, inhumanity.

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<sup>26</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, eds. John S. Brewer and James F. Dimock (New York: Penguin, 1982), 85.

<sup>27</sup> On this, see Lévi-Stauss' seminal work *The Raw and the Cooked*, especially "The Good Manners Sonata" and "Fugue of the Five Senses," 81-133, 147-163.

Medieval penitentials are a wealth of information about medieval concerns about food taboos, and particular with the fear of sharing food with beasts, which was clearly seen as an inhuman practice. This is a concern which is rooted in biblical dietary laws, such as not eating food killed by other animals, but it takes on a force and urgency in the early medieval period that is somewhat surprising. The penitentials push the biblical laws further, likely in an attempt to reinforce the church-sponsored boundaries between beast and human.<sup>28</sup> Joyce Salisbury's valuable study, *The Beast Within*, sets out the evidence clearly and persuasively that most Anglo-Saxon and Irish penitentials reinforce prohibitions against the sharing of one's food with beasts. If one's sheep or cow were destroyed by wolves or even dogs, the farmer could not make use of the carcass, nor even use the marrow of the bones. Similarly, if a man kills a beast which has been wounded by another type of animal, he can provisionally eat its flesh if he cuts away the bitten parts, but he is expressly forbidden to consume the animal at all if it has been killed by another beast.<sup>29</sup> Penance for eating food which has been contaminated by animals is graded by type. For example, one must perform penance of one day for eating grain which has been polluted by a mouse, but if one eats food that has been contaminated by a dog, the penance is a year. This penance is higher for sharing food, surprisingly,

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<sup>28</sup> Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> In Theodore of Canterbury, "Canones Gregorii," in F.W.H. Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen der abenländischen Kirche* (Halle: N.p., 1952), 175.

than it is for having sex with an animal! Barnyard animals which have inadvertently tasted the flesh of men are especially unclean and must be avoided at all costs — swine, hens, eggs, etc. must be destroyed and discarded.<sup>30</sup>

So when Johny Cock shares his bloody feast with his dogs, gorging himself with them on the bloody flesh of the deer, he has broken the taboos enumerated by the penitentials and carried on in later insular tradition — he is sharing raw meat with dogs, and this is a late instance of the recurring theme of wolfish outlawry, one that closely overlaps with the uncomfortable realm of cannibalism. This is due to the fact that many powerful traditions are working upon medieval accounts of outlawry and exile — the notion of the Devil as an outlaw or as a wolf in sheep's clothing, of Cain as a wolfish exile, and the notion of the exile's exclusion from normal communities of consumption.<sup>31</sup> The third chapter of this dissertation, which concerns itself specifically with the motif of the wolfish outlaw in Anglo-Saxon England, will address (and try to untangle) these intertwined threads of folklore acting upon the figure of the bestial outlaw.

The obsession with food in the outlaw tales is more than a reflex of the animality of the heroes; it is also a result of life for the average medieval European

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<sup>30</sup> See Ludwig Bieler, "Irish Canons I" and "Bigontian Penitentials," in *Irish Penitentials*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 5 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), 161, 163, 217.

<sup>31</sup> For an interesting study of community and exclusion in the Anglo-Saxon world, see the work of Hugh Magennis: "The Solitary Journey: Aloneness and Community in The Seafarer," in *Text, Image, Interpretation*, ed. Alistair Minnis and Jane Roberts (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2007); and *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996).



during a time when, due to the precarious “balance between agricultural output and the population level...there was the persistent threat of overpopulation and starvation because of the inefficiency of the system.”<sup>32</sup> Although many of these texts are preserved and generally composed by the elites of the English socioeconomic system, the reality of the persistent threat of hunger and even starvation was formidable. Arguably, this reality intensified during periods of social unrest and threat of invasion, as even the most comfortable elites could suddenly find themselves much lower on the food chain than they were previously.

Interestingly, apparently the peaks in writing about bestial outlaws, which I would identify as the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the 14<sup>th</sup> century, seem to occur at these moments of fear and unease, as if fear for food and safety were inextricably linked with the notion of the outlaw who is driven by animalistic need, and perhaps the idea of the threat of this possibility for members of the audience. During periods of gnawing hunger, the wolfish outlaw, with his primal appetites, becomes more than an understandable, though remote, bogeyman. He becomes a symbol of the reality lurking within even the most established civilization; of the precariousness of it, and the ease with which humanity can be compromised. He is a collective dream (or nightmare). As Marina Warner explains in her book on monsters and food, *No Go the Bogeyman*, “Control of food lies at the heart of the first werewolf story, the

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<sup>32</sup> Ponting, *A New Green History of the World*, 86. See also David Carpenter’s *The Struggle for Mastery: Britain 1066-1284* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 56-59, on famine ‘in years of bad harvest.’

transformation of Lycaon. ....Food – procuring it, preparing it, cooking it, and eating it – dominates the material as the overriding image of survival; consuming it offers contradictory metaphors of life and civilization as well as barbarity and extinction.”<sup>33</sup> Although the bestial outlaw is not a werewolf, he shares some common lore with that figure--namely, exile, a fixation upon the technicalities of savage food consumption, and extreme violence--and Warner’s observation thus provides an important way of thinking about this problem of food and survival in outlaw texts.

### *The Hunting of the Outlaw*

Johnny Cock is hunted, tracked, and slaughtered by humans, much as he earlier tracks and slaughters a deer. This is an important and common ironic inversion of the motif of the outlaw as a bestial predator. In the ‘hunting of the outlaw’ motif, the tables are turned on the exile, and his enemies set out to hunt him in a set-piece often complete with horns, horses, and bush beaters. The irony of this is self-evident, but I think it telling that this irony is so obvious, and that it was perpetuated throughout the middle ages. It simply makes it even clearer that the outlaw was seen as a beast fit to be hunted, truly a wearer of the wolf’s head.

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<sup>33</sup> Marina Warner, *No go the bogeyman: Scaring, lulling, and making mock*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), 12-13.

After he is hunted down, Johnny fights a furious last battle either crippled or legless, after having performed some sort of strengthening incantation: ““O bows of yew, if ye be true, / In London, where ye were bought, / Fingers five, get up belive, / Manhuid shall fail me nought.”” This chant seems to lend him enough strength to kill every forester who had attacked him, in spite of his missing or injured limb. This is a typical instance of the superhuman strength that bestial outlaws often seem able to summon at will. This amazing strength may have roots in a warrior tradition inherited from earlier Germanic or Celtic lore and passed down in the English narrative tradition in stories of outlaws like Hereward, Fulk Fitz Waryn, Fionn macCumhaill, Gamelyn, and Little John, who can fly into violent rages which make them especially powerful.

The foresters chop off Johnny Cock’s legs while he is sleeping, blood-drunk.<sup>34</sup> This is an example of a very interesting motif that appears intermittently in the bestial outlaw tradition: loss of limb. A surprising number of outlaws seem to meet their demise this way (Grettir, Johnny, Grendel, Robin Hood, Fulk fitz Waryn, and the half-human rapist bear in *Gesta Herewardi*) A possible reason for the recurrence of this grisly motif could be, again, experiential observation of the behavior of predators in the wild; when wolves, foxes, bears, and badgers are caught in a trap, it is fairly common to find only the caught leg in the iron teeth of the trap. The beasts

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<sup>34</sup> According to Barry Lopez, in *Of Wolves and Men*, “Wolves commonly go without food for three or four days and then gorge, eating as much as eighteen pounds of meat in one sitting. Then, ‘meat drunk’, they may lay out in the sun until the digestion is completed” (53).

will often summon their last strength to gnaw off their own feet in order to escape. Conversely, if the animal is still found in the trap, the human trapper must be careful to avoid the beast, which is often in a rage of anger and fear that lends it exceptional power. Again, the motif may be a result of the fundamental equation of outlaws with hunted beasts in the minds of the medieval authors of these tales. The outlaws' repeated loss of limb in these tales also could be a reflection of the actual punishments of criminals, who lost digits or limbs if they were lucky enough to escape the noose. In the case of the rebels at Ely, of which Hereward was a member, when William the Conqueror finally defeated their rebellion "most of the rebels were captures; some among them were imprisoned, while others were mutilated by blinding or having limbs removed before being allowed to go free."<sup>35</sup> Richard Firth Green argues that this fixation upon mutilation is a hallmark of the outlaw tradition specifically due to the reality of their ultimate institutional punishment.<sup>36</sup>

Most outlaws, like Robin Hood, Fulk Fitz Waryn, and Robert the Bruce, are capable of feats of evasion and speed that place them on par with the beasts of the forest. Like foxes they display uncanny cunning in tricking and evading their enemies, and they are also as swift as deer, performing feats of speed otherwise

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<sup>35</sup> From David Bates, *William the Conqueror* (London: George Philip Ltd., 1989), 83.

<sup>36</sup> From Richard Firth Green's "Violence in the Early Robin Hood Poems," in *'A Great Effusion of Blood': Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Mark Douglas Meyerson, Daniel Thiery and Oren Falk (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 270.

impossible for humans. Inhuman speed and power come to the forefront in outlaw narratives in the period after the Norman Conquest, so later chapters will deal more specifically with this strand in the tradition of bestial outlaw narratives.

### *Animal Companions*

Before he slaughters his murderers, Johnny Cock reproaches them with this strange speech: “you might well ha wakened me, /and asked gin I wad be taen. /The wildest wolf in aw this wood /Wad not ha done so by me; /She’d ha wet her foot ith wan water, /And sprinkled it oer my brae, /And if that wad not ha wakend me, /She wad ha gone and let me be.” This is the wolf-familiar, similar to the one that we see in St. Edmund’s *Vita* at least five hundred years earlier, the animal that acts contrary to nature in service of an exceptional human being. This wolf also appears in one guise or another in *Hereward*, *Bisclavret*, *William of Palerne*, Gerard of Wales’ story of Arthur and Gorlagon, and *Fulk Fitz Waryn*. In *Johnny Cock*, this motif has been twisted into a strange combination of menace and tenderness. Johnny asserts that the most ravenous wolf in the wood would have awoken him with a gentle sprinkle of water on his brow before attacking him. The sprinkling of water is particularly intriguing, since it looks sacramental; is Johnny fantasizing about some sort of ‘baptism’ by a wild animal? If so, what into kind of covenant would he be entering? It seems likely that he is moving away from the Christian covenant suggested by his mother’s food of bread and wine into a new communion with animals, shared with beasts, with its own savage baptismal rituals. Whatever the

case, Johnny seems to ascribe to the “wildest wolf in aw the wood” a certain code of honor and a moral sensibility that his human attackers lack. This shows for a third time Johnny’s sense of kinship with the animal world, not the human one, a trait he shares with many other outlaws. His previous moment of kinship with animals (his mad hunt with his dogs) is also, arguably, a late instance of the motif of the wolfish outlaw, as the dogs and Johnny simply perform the role of predator previously filled by wild wolf packs. Perhaps earlier versions of the ballad depicted Johnny running with wolves, not dogs – this would certainly explain better the appearance of the helper-wolf later in the ballad, although this is a long shot.

A fundamental ambiguity inheres in the tradition. For example, in Johnny’s case, his identification with wolves marks him as their kinsman in all their perceived demonic aspects (which were very prominently displayed in the medieval period) – bloodlust, greed, stupidity, and brutality, among other defects. The loss of human reason and empathy makes the outlaw figures formidably dangerous characters – irrational and bloody-minded. The merging of human and animal consciousness results in a blurring of the boundaries of experience, and in turn, a fundamental moral ambiguity which may be the most representative trademark of the bestial outlaw tradition. After all, outlaws wear the ‘wolves’ head,’ and this is clearly not seen as a good thing in the laws of the period. And ultimately, they are doomed to suffer the punishment that the title of ‘wolves’ head’ entails.

### *Outlaw Narrative as Elegy*

The sense of doom and fatalism that pervades the ballad of Johny Cock is another fundamental aspect of the bestial outlaw tradition. The notion of being hunted, inexorably, sometimes for decades, just as a beast in the forest can be, lends a specifically powerful atmospheric fatalism to the tales and poems about outlaws. The hero's violent end at the hands of hostile pursuers is an unstated given. This is the inevitable truth of the whole genre, so deeply a part of the bestial outlaw tradition that it often is not analyzed by its most astute critics, who have become so used to the reality of doom in the narratives that they forget to call their audience's attention to it. A common extension of this basic fatalism is the almost as prevalent depiction of the outlaw hero as the 'last of his breed,' an endangered figure who stands for some outmoded ideal, for a different, extinct time with a different set of extinct values. Hereward, the last Anglo-Saxon hero; Fulk Fitz Waryn, a proud lord fighting for his rights in the face of a power-hungry monarch; Robin Hood and Gamelyn, both figured as the last true nobleman forced out of his land by his integrity; Grettir, the last hero of the Viking age; and William Wallace, the doomed resistance fighter: all stand for some human value, a good custom or society which is passing away. All of these figures are portrayed as the last and the greatest of their moribund breed. Again, the perhaps unconscious identification of human beings with the processes impacting animal populations is present here. Like the wolves

and bears, who are likewise hunted to extinction, at least in England, the outlaws represent the last of their extinct species.<sup>37</sup>

Thus the medieval English tradition of outlaw narrative, as I broadly identify it, takes on a certain elegiac tone, a backwards-looking sadness and nostalgia that often comes with another distinct feature of the tradition: betrayal. Since the outlaw hero is often imbued with superhuman animalistic strength and cunning, as well as armed with the superior morals of a time gone by, he must be destroyed by a Judas from within his ranks, as no ordinary human could be capable of capturing or hunting him. Thus is Johny Cock destroyed – in one of the versions of the ballad his nephew is one of the seven foresters, and he appears to feel some compunction for the ignoble way his relative is slain – in a betrayal similar to that of Robin Hood, Hereward, Robert the Bruce, Bisclavret, Fulk Fitz Waryn, and many others.

Part of this elegiac tone must be due in part to the storytellers' recognition of the theme of freedom versus domesticity. They, as 'tame' citizens, can't help but recognize, and in some ways envy, the wild freedom of the outlaw. Thus their narratives gain a certain wistfulness that can be discerned in the Greenwood passages of the late medieval outlaw ballads, the loving and edenic description of the fenland in the legend of Hereward, and even, at times, in the sublime Anglo-

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<sup>37</sup> Bears were extinct in England by the 12<sup>th</sup> century and wolves were hunted out of the central areas by the 1300s, although not entirely extinct in Great Britain until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. See the article by C. Aybes and D.W. Yalben, "Place-name evidence for the former distribution and status of wolves and beavers in Britain," *Mammal Review* 25, no. 4 (1995): 201–226.



Saxon descriptions of the otherwise treacherous landscape inhabited by the outlaws and exiles. This motif is also present in animal fables about the wolf and the dog; the wolf scorns the dog for his servile domesticity, but the dog reminds the wolf that he gets food regularly and with ease while the wolf must suffer and work for his meals.<sup>38</sup> This seems, in a way, a literary justification of a life of servitude, and the outlaw narratives function along the same lines, both admiring and censoring the outlaws for their uninhibited lifestyles.

These characteristics form a complex of images and motifs that go back into the distant past of European culture. Dionysian rituals of classical antiquity are responsible for many of the popular characteristics of the wild man or bestial outlaw in the middle ages, because many of the basic features were consolidated in the popular depictions of these orgies: "Lasciviousness, cannibalism, ingestion of raw meat, animal-like behaviour, bestial traits (nakedness, hairy skin, equine legs, etc.), an uncontrollable lust for wine, and a rejection of "normal" sociability."<sup>39</sup> Ancient Germanic pagan culture consolidated a variation of these motifs: Lasciviousness, brutality, ingestion of raw meat, animal-like behavior and/or shapeshifting, rejection of "normal" sociability, and extreme rages.<sup>40</sup> The mythic complex of the

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<sup>38</sup> For the fable of the wolf and the dog, see *Phaedrus* #7, *Babrius* 100, in Ben Edwin Perry, ed., *Babrius and Phaedrus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 129, 267-68, 456.

<sup>39</sup> Bartra, *Wild Men Through the Looking Glass*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> On the Germanic tradition, see H.R.E Davidson's "Shape-Changing in the Old Norse Sagas," in *Animals in Folklore*, ed. Joshua Roy Porter and William Moy Stratton Russell (Ipswich, England: D. S. Brewer, 1978), 132; and Gabriel Turville-Petre's "Outlawry," in *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi*

Judeo-Christian Mediterranean contributed still other traits: brutality, loss of reason, distance or exile from divinity, loss of dietary control, bestial traits (feathers, claws, hooves, etc.), and animal-like behavior. The Celtic tradition contributed: animal-like behavior and/or shapeshifting, travelling in wolfish bands of outlaws, rejection of “normal” sociability, extreme physique-distorting rages, and the gaining of a deep knowledge of nature and sage-like wisdom.<sup>41</sup> It becomes fairly clear from this admittedly generalizing list that more than one powerful heritage is working upon the medieval bestial outlaw, and that these traits, although they often mesh seamlessly, sometimes result in contradictions. For example, the Celtic notion of the exile in the wilderness resulting in increased wisdom and magical power does not seamlessly correspond with the Judeo-Christian idea of exile as a punishment or damnation.<sup>42</sup> These contradictions remain dissonant throughout the bestial outlaw tradition in England, and result in some very interesting literature.

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*Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977*, ed. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), 769-778.

<sup>41</sup> On the Celtic tradition, see Joseph Falaky Nagy's *The Wisdom of the Outlaw: The Boyhood Deeds of Finn in Gaelic Narrative Tradition* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011); and John Carey's "Werewolves in Medieval Ireland," *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 44, Winter (1994): 37-72.

<sup>42</sup> But see the legend of Suibne Geilt, an exiled bestial king, whose shapeshifting functions as an effective punishment for his hubris and wrongdoing. On this, see William Sayers, "Varia VII The Deficient Ruler as Avian Exile: Nebuchadnezzar and Suibhne Geilt," *Ériu* 43, (1992): 217-220.

### *The Aims of this Study*

This heterogeneous collection of motifs matters, beyond proving that the bestial outlaw tradition is a distinct phenomenon which stretches over a vast period of time, because it points toward a very complex cluster of ideas, which function rhizomatically, in different configurations. They resist binary interpretation (or to continue with Deleuze and Guattari's helpful formulation, the arborescent or hierarchical construction of meaning or knowledge) always pushing away from the determined, static meaning which was perhaps the intention of the poet or oral-traditional community, towards an aesthetic wallowing in some sort of conception of the natural.<sup>43</sup> In the uncontrollable upwelling of these rhizomatic motifs, the poet's (we will say a single poet for the sake of brevity) inclination towards the epic and political is overwhelmed and undermined by the deep structure of the folkloric morphology on which he intuitively draws, and the literature slides away from the epic towards the lyric.

Nearly all the manifestations of various combinations of these bestial outlaw motifs point toward a series of deep paradoxes which are central to the tradition, and give it its wildness and also its magnetism. As we have seen from the previous catalogue of features the outlaw is backwards looking yet atavistically violent; in his

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<sup>43</sup> On rhizomatic versus arborescent, see Deleuze, Guattari and Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 8-11.

politics, he is generally forward looking in his 'proto-democracy,' yet deeply conservative in a doomed sort of way. In his existence, he is fundamentally dysfunctional, delighting in nature yet destroyed by it. In his habits, he is portrayed as nearly cannibalistic, a creature who represents consumption in the extreme yet also stands for a dream of unconsumed, untouched wilderness. He is the product of an incredibly conservative folk tradition which is preserved in many disparate languages by writers and poets with very different agendas. There is hardly any aspect of the English bestial outlaw, in fact, which is not fundamentally paradoxical in some way. It is in these complex and paradoxical problems that the outlaw literature derives its fascination and complexity. In this dialectic of paradox, in which opposed ideas are loosely woven together in an uncontainable way, we find new sprouts of deep poetic lyrical appreciation of what is not human, of something that is perhaps unnamable. At the end, we are left with a body of narratives which are atavistic, and perhaps, unredeemably wild. They are nature writing, but they go beyond that, and speak to something deep in the human heart which can only be satisfied by this looking over the edge into another kind of life. And these paradoxes undermine any ultimate political meaning given to individual outlaw narratives.

This study does not undertake to examine some broader werewolf tradition, nor does it deal with either werewolfery or animal metamorphosis as a folkloric phenomenon. Instead, it undertakes to follow the career of the English outlaw through the Middle Ages in an examination of the ways in which he often becomes part of nature, often in ways that ally him symbolically with 'outlawed' animals,

namely the wolf, bear, and fox (and at times with less rapacious but still at times threatening creatures like the hart). In many ways, this is the direct result of the hardships of an outlaw's life — necessity often impels him to perform acts of rapine and violence against human settlement that are normally performed by savage animals, whose territory and habitat he now shares (or takes over). These animalistic acts of rapine seem to work some sort of transformation in the outlaw, at least according to these outlaw narratives, and he often becomes more beast than man. His soul, for example, is jeopardized when he adopts the habits and customs of beasts, as the tradition of Nebuchadnezzar's exile shows. His body, too, is subjected to all the deprivations of the beasts of the field and forest, although in ways, this offers him hope for salvation, as a *passio* in this life can sometimes lead to paradise in the next.

This is one of the many ways in which bestial outlawry can intersect with saintly paths in tangled and intriguing ways. For a saintly hermit is also subjected to these same natural forces; he allows wildness to work its way through him as part of his path to purification. Also, both outlaw and saint tend to have animal familiars who aid them in their distress or keep them company in their wild solitude. This ambiguity often begs the question: how can we determine who is saint and who outlaw, 'fah wið Gode'? Indeed, these two strains of medieval outdoorsmanship intersect awkwardly in the figure of the Wild Man, an oftentimes terrifyingly bestial humanoid who can live a saintly life of penance and humiliation in the wood with animals, but who also seems to harbor vast stores of barely-restrained violence. The

classic example of this figure appears in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*, where a gigantic and monstrous wild man herds beasts in a wild Edenic landscape and carries a massive club. When the hero asks him whether he is good or evil (what sort of creature he might be), he answers simply: "I am a man." But his otherness, hideousness, and barely-restrained violent savagery argue otherwise. It seems that, due to their closeness in theme to both saints' lives and wild man narratives, outlaw legends reliably attract these saintly and monstrous threads to their own amalgamations of legend, history, and imagination. By the end of the Middle Ages, the masterpiece *The Gest of Robin Hood* seems to parody these strands of sanctity and animality as it repeatedly plays up the men of the Greenwood's 'hard orders' and obsession with food and running. But the element that will *always* separate these bestial saints, hairy anchorites and even wild men from more conventional outlaws is the violence inherent in the outlawed figure, the bloodlust and irrationality that makes him closer kin to wolves than men.

The way in which outlaws inhabit nature offers many opportunities for study. The outlaw, in his continual fluidity between animal and man, interacts with his specific landscape and, more generally, with nature, in a revelatory way. The transformed outlaw becomes subject to and part of his landscape, not master of it, as the human figure generally is in the Christian worldview, as here in the words of God to Noah: "et terror vester ac tremor sit super cuncta animalia terrae et super

omnes volucres caeli cum universis quae moventur in terra omnes pisces maris manui vestrae traditi sunt.”<sup>44</sup> In the case of the outlaw, the interaction between protagonist and the natural world becomes more terrifying, elemental, and revealing. In fact, it becomes the exact reverse of Noah’s covenant with God; the human is delivered into the jaws and claws of the animals, and the dread and fear of the beasts shall be upon him until his dying day or the day he is repatriated. I am not looking so much at the idea of metamorphosis itself and its technicalities, as I am looking at nature through the eyes of an animal, or rather through the eyes of an author imagining nature through the eyes of what he imagines as ‘animal,’ all of which are, of course, cultural constructs of an unknowable reality. Nevertheless, using animal outlaws to trace ideas about and perceptions of nature will prove a productive method of getting at the idea of the natural world in the Middle Ages.

In tracing these ideas, we will begin to map a literary history of changes the way society functions and crafts its meaning. Although it is shaped by nature, human culture itself shapes changes in nature. The story of any cultural belief is of necessity a story of co-evolution. We must move away from a static notion of nature as a passive recipient of human action and towards a richer and more nuanced vision of the medieval period. Exploring outlawry as one of the more ritualized

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<sup>44</sup> “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth...and into your hand are they delivered” Genesis 9:2. Latin cited from the Douay-Rheims BSV; English translation from Michael David Coogan, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Carol A. Newsom, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

points of direct contact between the human and the natural world can help accomplish this. I want to show how tracing these moments of bestial outlawry through the literature helps highlight changing English attitudes about nature and landscape. Following these different motifs under the assumption that they are part of a tradition allows me to use changes in the way similar figures are treated throughout the medieval period as a way of getting at cultural values in flux. For example, if the figure of the wolfish outlaw suffers less from the elements in the later Middle English period, does this hint at a more idealized, romantic vision of the countryside on the part of the creators of the story? Or did nature seem less threatening, as humans began to live lives more removed from the natural?

Part of this study, then, will involve actual demographic and geographic studies of both animal and human populations in Great Britain—I will attempt to determine whether changes in the populations of wild animals (and specifically alpha predators) correspond to changes in the narrative tradition. Similarly, I will trace whether patterns of deforestation and reforestation have any impact on the kinds of narratives being performed concerning the bestial outlaw.

A larger aim is to show that the notion of bestial outlawry is one of the most widespread and fundamental motifs in English literature, and that it spans the entire medieval period and survives in folklore up to the twentieth century. This comparative approach should uncover new insights into the modern ecological predicament—tracing the history of Anglophone attitudes about the interaction between animal and human shows us more about our attitudes about the natural



world today. We begin to see an overarching narrative of the interaction between the English countryside and its inhabitants, and an inherited history which has great ramifications in the colonies of the British Empire.

Of course, this sort of search for a systematic definition of some past interaction between humans and their natural world is bound to be problematic, especially since any modern reader of Old English and Middle English texts is necessarily bound to view the medieval world through modern eyes. She will always see that world, to a certain extent, the way she wants it to look, and that is the danger of this sort of inquiry. The critical discipline of ecocriticism will help provide me with a method. Ecocriticism will help us highlight the ways in which landscape and ecology shape human thought and are in turn shaped by human perception and desire for order. In particular, it “tries to analyze implicit cultural attitudes toward nature and related issues of ethnicity and power that might otherwise lie unexamined.”<sup>45</sup> So, for example, how do the waves of colonial occupation of Great Britain shape English visions of nature and the animals who inhabit it, and how does this, in turn, shape outlaw narratives? As Overing and Lees argue, “we share places with the past, and medievalists, perhaps especially, have much to gain from a thoroughgoing examination of place, an ever more layered and

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<sup>45</sup> Alfred K. Siewers, “Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac’s Mound and Grendel’s Mere As Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation-Building,” *Viator* 34 (2003): 2.

complex understanding of landscape through time.”<sup>46</sup> We need to be conscious of the ‘power and particularity of place and its capacity to generate belief and conviction.” But we also bring our own consciousness to bear on places: “We enter into places armed with our cultural memories; we read the landscape, we inhabit it, we shape it, and we remember it. Such remembering is a profoundly interactive process of mind with place.”<sup>47</sup> This kind of approach, which is also fundamentally interdisciplinary, since it needs to take into account philosophy of space, archaeology, aesthetics, and of course literature, helps one approach nature with a set of tools that can turn up interesting discoveries. However, medieval England remains a foreign world, and the attitudes of its inhabitants toward their immediate surroundings is probably the most difficult thing of all to recreate. It is therefore useful to keep Nicholas Howe’s words in mind when engaging in this sort of study, when he says that it is liberating to work in a “period that has no overwhelming vision of the landscape, such as Wordsworth or Constable provided, looming over the subject as they would for someone writing about landscape in nineteenth-century Britain.”<sup>48</sup> This means that “anyone studying the landscape of early medieval England must hunt about for evidence and must then let that evidence suggest the ways in which landscape was envisioned and figured in the culture. Interpretive models that might elsewhere be useful, whether they invoke allegory or

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<sup>46</sup> Lees and Overing, *A Place to Believe in*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Lees and Overing, *A Place to Believe in*, 4-6.

<sup>48</sup> Howe and Wolfe, *Inventing medieval landscapes*, 108.

the sublime or Ecocriticism, feel curiously overdetermined when applied to Anglo-Saxon [or, to a lesser extent, Middle English] materials."<sup>49</sup>

### *The Scope of this Study*

Maurice Keen, in his canon-establishing work *The Outlaw Legend*, coins the term, 'Matter of the Greenwood' to describe the body of medieval romances, prose narratives, and ballads whose main concern is the forest and its denizens, in contrast to other romances and narratives that view the forest as a transitional space of brief adventure or exile, not the boundary of the entire action of the plot. Of the forests he writes: "Within its bounds their whole drama was enacted. If [the outlaws] ventured outside it, it would only be some brief expedition to avenge wrong done and to return to it, when right had been restored and whatever sheriff or abbot that was the villain of the piece had been brought low."<sup>50</sup>

This study deals in the main with works that fall squarely within this rubric of the 'Matter of the Greenwood'; the stories of Hereward, Robin Hood, Gamelyn, and Fulk Fitz Waryn are all outlaw tales, with, as I will show, some aspect of beastliness attached to them. But this dissertation also engages works from other genres and periods if they show evidence of the central phenomenon under examination. Elegies, wisdom poetry, heroic epics, histories, lays, and homilies all

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>50</sup> Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 2.

fall within the scope of this study at some point, as they all bear traces of this same motif of bestial exile.

I identify these works as part of a broad cultural phenomenon of bestial-outlaw narrative, which, I argue, played an important part in the popular imagination throughout the Middle Ages. The extant works that remain with us today are but the tip of a vast iceberg of popular production of stories, songs, and epics about men who live in the woods and take on aspects of the same beasts who surround them. Scholars have argued for years that the early Robin Hood ballads are but the tiniest representative sample of the volume of oral poems and songs about the redoubtable late medieval hero. This is confirmed by one of the earliest mentions of the genre in *Piers Plowman*, where Sloth sings songs of Robin Hood in the tavern, showing that the material was well-known and popular enough to be disapproved of by Langland in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. I will push this argument further, stressing the hypothesis that one of the aspects of the Robin Hood genre – bestial outlawry – is a motif that has survived undamaged in its fundamental iteration since the migration period, and has become a tradition of its own that spans over a thousand years of English literary history. I use the word ‘tradition’ specifically, because the word conjures ideas of a legacy, something passed on from generation to generation in more or less whole cloth. It is not a genre, as the outlaw narratives assume many different generic forms over the centuries, discarding one form for another in a matter of decades in a sort of literary-evolutionary example of ‘survival of the fittest’ – or the most relevant, perhaps.

### *Assumptions and Further Methodology*

One of the assumptions this study makes is that medieval English outlaws did live outside normal society. Historical evidence admittedly points to the contrary in many cases. But this study is primarily concerned with the notion of outlawry in literature, which does overwhelmingly place its outlaws and exiles in situations in the remote wilderness, and if the literature of outlawry does not reflect historical reality of the periods in which the works were composed, my duty as a critic is to analyze the work the literature does first, and then turn to the inconsistencies between an imaginary landscape of exile and its historical reality if necessary.

Another assumption of this study that bears explanation is that outlaws are repeatedly associated with animality, and that this is an unbroken tradition that extends throughout the medieval period and beyond. The notion of the bestial outlaw being presumably a result of pre-Christian Germanic law and possibly religious lore is one that has been discussed at length for the past century and a half, and the evidence remains inconclusive.<sup>51</sup> It is, however, a peripheral concern in this study, which concerns itself directly with a defined body of outlaw narratives that presents the exiled figure within some sort of bestial context. It argues that this is a folkloric tradition with a discernible lineage, but not that this is a result of some

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<sup>51</sup> See E.G. Stanley's rebuttal of the notion that wolves were associated with outlawry in "Wolf, My Wolf!," in *Old English and New: Studies in Language and Linguistics in Honor of Frederic G. Cassidy*, ed. Joan H. Hall, Nick Doane, and Dick Ringer (London: Garland, 1992), 46-57.

magico-religious notion of transformation that has survived intact as a heritage of a Bronze-Age pagan past. Such an assertion is, ultimately not provable, as Eric Stanley and others have pointed out, and, whatever the case, it does not damage or improve the argument of this study.

Although the concerns of ecocriticism will function as the guiding star of this inquiry, the primary methodology of this monograph will be based on folklore studies, the best approach to material that is in some way traditional and based on oral performance and diffusion, as these outlaw narratives overwhelmingly are. I will draw from the best of the multiple theoretical approaches in order to create the most balanced methodology possible. The historical-geographical (Finnish) method, which aims to reconstruct a folktale through detailed examination of each manifestation of the tale-type, proves useful to this kind of study, when confined within specific parameters. In its search for an ur-tale and belief in a 'wave-like diffusion' of the tale, it does not aid our search, which follows the path of the bestial outlaw motif as an end in itself, acknowledging that there is no way of – nor any point in – finding any vestige of the original motif, beyond acknowledging on the basis of material evidence in archeological finds that the motif must be ancient indeed. Conceding to the impossibility of tracing this motif, which is certainly international in its manifestation. I confine my study to the British subtype which is shaped into a specific variant of the international outlaw type by cultural and geographical factors.

Using aspects of the Finnish method set forth by Antti Aarne and his followers, this study isolates specific traits of this tale-type, the motifs, the indivisible units of folklore, the “details out of which full-fledged narratives are composed” which may “be centered on a certain type of character in a tale, sometimes on an action, sometimes on attendant circumstances of the action.”<sup>52</sup> There is a body of motifs which are combined and recombined to create various motif clusters that point to a family of bestial outlaw texts. Each of these motifs also can be located in cousin motif clusters in related tale types (especially hermit and wild man narratives). This study will also locate and identify figures of speech associated with or native to the tale-type in the British Isle, documenting their occurrence, mapping the geographical spread over time of the tale-type, and attempting to come to some conclusions about what appears to be the rise and fall and rise again of the theme of the bestial outlaw in Great Britain.

In a way, this work will be historical-reconstructional, as it will take into account the accretions over time of different groups of immigrant peoples.<sup>53</sup> But it will not be in an attempt to discover some core mythological or cosmological belief,

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<sup>52</sup> From Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), 11.

<sup>53</sup> I.e. the northern European substrate, the late Anglo-Saxon and Danish influences, and ultimately the Norman explosion of outlaw narrative. The different layers of accretion can be seen to a certain extent in the literature; one need only consider the fertile cross-pollination of outlaw narratives in the 200 years after the Norman conquest to recognize that many different cultural motifs and biases are being brought to bear on the basic tale-type. For the classic (and deeply flawed) example of this method of historical reconstruction of folklore, see G.L. Gomme’s *Folklore as an Historical Science* (London: Methuen, 1908).

but rather, to show how this tale type flourishes for different groups at different times, with no etiological or eschatological prejudice. Although this is of necessity a linear study, I do not wish to give precedence to either the earliest manifestations of the tale-type or the latest.

The bestial outlaw tale-type is a good place to apply the folklorist Ruth Benedict's claim that "suppressed tensions in the society are released and made manifest in the oral literature."<sup>54</sup> In this case, of course, tensions between wild and tame, fear and fascination with the wild, and narratives of deforestation or conservation can be clearly seen. This functional theory of folklore holds that a folk product is a vehicle for "reinforcement of custom and taboo, release of aggressions through fantasy, pedagogical explanations of the natural world, and applications of pressures for conventional behavior."<sup>55</sup> This functional approach is, of course, useful for a study of the outlaw tradition, which continually explores the boundary behavior between the raw and the cooked — the wild and the civilized, the bestial and the human. So without further ado, let us set out on our journey. The following two chapters will explore figures of animalistic exile in Anglo-Saxon England.

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<sup>54</sup> From Richard Dorson's discussion of Ruth Benedict's theory in *Folklore and Folklife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 21.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE WOLFISH OUTLAW IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

The wild man lives in the collective European imagination as a living reminder for Western man that it would have been better for him not to have been born, or, rather, as the vehicle by which man casts doubts on the meaning of life at each turn.<sup>56</sup>

No Anglo-Saxon outlaw epic has survived the centuries, but I feel safe in arguing that bestial outlawry was a common motif in Anglo-Saxon literary tradition. Exile is an important and common theme of the Anglo-Saxon poetry that remains to us, and it is saturated with images of wilderness, inhumanity, and madness. Thus, although we don't have an outlaw/beast epic in the extant Anglo-Saxon literature, there exist in the fabric of metaphor and allusion coming from many different sources a number of hints that the idea of bestial outlawry was common. Many critics have studied the elegies and other poems upon which this dissertation touches, but none according to my knowledge have focused on the ways in which bestial exile forms a unified theme throughout the Anglo-Saxon corpus – not only in the elegies, but also in the biblical poems, epic poems, and homilies. This chapter identifies the four main types of bestial exiles or outlaws in Anglo-Saxon poetic and prose texts, each of which portrays some aspect of the complex cluster of ideas and motifs dealing with exile and animality which performed a powerful reifying function in the Anglo-Saxon period. For the sake of convenience, I classify the Old English figures of exile

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<sup>56</sup> Bartra, *Wild Men Through the Looking Glass*, 204.

under a fourfold schema – the cannibalistic exile, the wretched exile, the wolfish trickster, and the bestial hero all represent aspects of the bestial outlaw, in conjunction outlining and establishing a tradition of characterization of exiles as bestial, and, often more specifically, lupine. Before analyzing specific texts, I will briefly outline the social, political, and cultural currents which define this tradition in the Anglo-Saxon period through an examination of the historical evidence for attitudes towards and laws concerning outlawry, then turn to an analysis of Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards nature and wolves from an ecocritical perspective. After these introductory sections, I will analyze the four different figures of outlawry in turn, drawing upon a wide range of Anglo-Saxon poetic and prose material to demonstrate that the bestial outlaw was a prominent figure in the literary cosmology of the time.

### *Historical and Cultural Outlaw Realities*

The historical outlaw in the Anglo-Saxon period is at the same time a prominent and murky figure. The punishment of exile from a community was a relatively common one, if the surviving laws, which bear witness to the great number of offenses for which one could be outlawed, can be trusted. The word *outlaw* – from the Norse legal term *útlagr* – is not actually applied to the exiled figure until late in the Anglo-Saxon period, but the equivalent OE word, *fliema*, was in

common use in the earlier law codes.<sup>57</sup> The Scandinavian loan-word *utlah* enters the English record during Alfred's time, but the concept is considerably older, arguably a relic of a pan-Germanic legal structure. As the Norse and the eventually the Normans, both of whom also maintained aspects of the same aboriginal legal system, compounded their systems with the Anglo-Saxon ones, the tradition of outlawry could only have intensified. As Crosland puts it, "The *foris bannitus* of Frankish law was in much the same position [as the Anglo-Saxon] and anyone who harbored the fugitive laid himself open to heavy penalties. There were many equivalents of *utlah* or *utlaga* in the pre-Norman and Norman laws: we find, side by side with *foris-bannitus* the terms *exlex*, *foris-factus* (forfeit), *exul*, and the Saxon word is Latinized: *utlages weorc* becomes *opus utlagii* and the verb *utlagare* or *uylegare* came into quite common use."<sup>58</sup>

I cite in full Hilda Swanson's description of outlawry, since she does an admirable job of presenting the basic aspects of the practice, noting "the fictive tendency of the technique of execution, the tendency to let the criminal die without direct intervention on the part of his executioners at the decisive moment":

A sentence of complete outlawry, in spite of the long evasions of such outlaws as Grettir, must often have meant death. The laws of Alfred, from the end of the ninth century, indicate that it may have

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<sup>57</sup> Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* (Halle a.S: M. Niemeyer, 1903-16), 1:42 (MS E), my punctuation. F. L. Attenborough, ed. and trans., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922). Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Crosland, 11-12.

been almost impossible for an outlaw to find himself a new lord and community elsewhere...In the Old English *Genesis*, Cain is a banished individual condemned to wandering far from his kin, an exile that represents his spiritual separation from his Lord. The outlaw, besides being spiritually or symbolically dead to his community, could well become literally dead as...[the] "wineleas haele," one suspects, would not long live.<sup>59</sup>

But what kinds of misdeeds actually resulted in outlawry in the Anglo-Saxon world?

Law records show that, while some of the misdeeds were relatively innocuous, like failing to mention a trip away, many of these were very serious crimes, requiring a level of brutality that make a community question the miscreant's humanity, especially within the perspective of Divine Law. People who commit heinous crimes like rape, murder, witchcraft, and treason lose their rights to the status of 'human'; humanity is not a biological, but a spiritual state of being. In this way, the wolf's head is not some sort of 'legal poetry,' as has been previously argued, a "magico-legal transformation of the medieval criminal into a wolf, or rather werewolf," but rather a sort of verbal reality, pointing to the fact that these outlaws are no longer human in a fundamental way.<sup>60</sup> The outlaw was outside communal, kingly, and

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<sup>59</sup> Swanson, 129-130 .

<sup>60</sup> See M. Jacoby, *Nordische Ortsnamen mit varg – "Wolf" "Verbrecher" und ulv – "Wolf" Mit einer Karte*, Beitrage zur nordischen Philologie 8 (N.p.: Heidelberg, 1976); and Mary Gerstein, "Germanic Warg: The Outlaw as Werewolf" in *Myth in Indo-European Antiquity*, ed. Gerald James Larson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 131-156.

heavenly law – no distinction seems to be made between these separate legal categories.<sup>61</sup>

The connection between outlaws and wolves was arguably a formal one. That this is an old equation is supported by the existence of other Germanic outlaw words such as *vargr* or *wearg*, which lexically equate the outlawed human specifically with wolves. The logical connections between outlaws and wolves are inherent in many different ways. First, outlaws were required to flee to uninhabited spaces, which were often also the abodes of wild animals; since wolves are the most dangerous of wild beasts, they become fundamentally associated with the space they inhabit. Therefore, the human who shares their home in the wilderness becomes, in some way, wolflike. Second, outlaws, like wolves, can be hunted and decapitated by anyone who chooses to undertake the task – the relative simplicity of ending an outlaw's life underlines his basic loss of humanity. Finally, the outlaw's need to find food for himself may perhaps have led to his preying upon settled areas, perhaps stealing livestock or foodstuffs in a way quite similar to the activities of wolves.

A human outlaw is an uncanny outcast; bereft of his humanity, he wears a 'wulfsheafod' which allows him to be hunted down and killed as if he were, for all intents and purposes, a wolf or other uncomfortably eerie animal. When he dies, he can expect to be buried in some liminal no-man's-land like a crossroads or a beach.

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<sup>61</sup> See William A. Chaney's article, "Grendel and the Gifstol: A Legal View of Monsters," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 77, no. 5 (1962): 513-520, 516.

What it means to be hunted like a beast is a question which this dissertation will explore in detail, but the specific question here is: what did it mean to be hunted like a wolf in Anglo-Saxon England? Records show that wolf-hunting was a common, widespread practice. If the lawbooks are to be trusted, Kings Edgar and Athelstan made tributes of wolves' hides and tongues a kind of currency, at least, according to later historians such as William of Malmesbury who said famously that

The rigour of Edgar's justice was equal to the sanctity of his manners, so that he permitted no person, be his dignity what it might, to elude the laws with impunity. In his time there was no private thief, no public freebooter, unless such as chose to risk the loss of life for their attacks upon the property of others. How, indeed, can it be supposed that he would pass over the crimes of men when he designed to exterminate every beast of prey from his kingdom ; and commanded Judwall, king of the Welsh, to pay him yearly a tribute of three hundred wolves? This he performed for three years, but omitted in the fourth, declaring that he could find no more.<sup>62</sup>

Such records as this, which is admittedly not Anglo-Saxon but is one which seems to have come down to William of Malmesbury in some tradition, note that one of the great features of such relatively powerful kings as Edgar was the control of both Celtic populations and animal populations through the body of the wolf.

Additionally, it seems that whole parties of men made it their Saturdays' task to hunt down as many wolves as possible in order to make their communities safer. The threat of this sort of massive hunt effort in search of a human quarry might have

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<sup>62</sup> La ii. c. 8.

been fearsome enough to dissuade many a potential felon, even though humans may be more adept at avoiding capture than a bestial quarry might be.

But while it appears shameful to be labeled a beast and hunted as such, if we consider the evidence of naming practices, we must conclude that the Anglo-Saxons felt ambivalent towards wolves. The wolf element is one of the most common in Anglo-Saxon names, hinting at some deeply-felt respect for this 'beast of waste and desolation.' Since these names show up in the chronicles stretching far back into the pagan past, even into the pre-migration legendary material, it is not fanciful to suggest that these names were part of an animistic pagan Germanic naming-system that harnessed the fierce powers of such animals as wolves and bears for the warriors' use. According to H.R.E Davidson, "there seems little doubt that both bear and wolf were associated with an important form of magic, that concerned with battle, the ritual which sought to establish good luck and victory for warriors."<sup>63</sup> And, even centuries after they had ceased to be pagan, Anglo-Saxons continued to name a large percentage of their children after wolves and bears. Stephen Glosecki sums up the argument for a positive register in wolf names:

The animal content of names like *Wulfstan* was archaic by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, but by no means forgotten. The salutary aspects of the guardian – and the custom of compounding *wulf* and *ulf* in personal names – works against Gerstein's argument that Germanic "werewolf" imagery was uniformly negative....It is just too hard to believe that parents would name their children after such

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<sup>63</sup> H.R.E. Davidson, "Shape-Changing in the Old Norse Sagas," 132.

unpropitious evil as an outlaw bound for hanging and stabbing, or a crop disease capable of starving an entire community. This seems unlikely among animistic tribes, where the naming of a creature of power can be tantamount to conjuring it up.<sup>64</sup>

Although his argument is weakened by his habitual slippage between late Anglo-Saxon figures like Wulfstan and their milieu and a distant and very hazy 'tribal' Germanic animistic past, Glosecki is correct in his incredulity at the suggestion that all those wolf names are not, in some way, a sign of respect for this predator. Since Glosecki's argument for a shamanistic society in Pre-Christian England, Neil Price has made a similar argument for Pre-Christian Scandinavian societies, pointing out wide-ranging evidence for an animistic warrior cult.<sup>65</sup> The Wuffings and the Volsungs are prominent examples of the ascendant family claiming relation to wolves, particularly as part of their Odinic heritage. The Wuffings, the royal line of East Anglia, appear to have minted coins with the image of a wolf on them, a reference to their family animal (Series Z, type 66), as well as coins depicting Romulus and Remus in the company of wolves (Aethelbert's penny, Secondary Series V, BMC Type 7). There is a high probability that these in turn are based on Iron Age *stater* which portray a bristling wolf, suggesting that the wolf had been a

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<sup>64</sup> Stephen O. Glosecki, *Shamanism and Old-English Poetry* (New York: Garland, 1989), 57.

<sup>65</sup> See Neil S. Price, *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2002, and *The Archaeology of Shamanism* (London and New York: Psychology Press, 2001).



popular symbol for East Anglian power for many centuries.<sup>66</sup> The famous purse-lid from the mound 1 burial, with its “man between beasts” motif, is believed to be associated with the Wuffings.<sup>67</sup> The Volsungs appear to be linked with the Wuffings genealogically.<sup>68</sup> If Joe Harris’ hypothesis about the poem *Wulf and Eadwacer’s* being part of the cycle of literature about the Wuffings is true, then we have even stronger evidence for the veneration of ‘wolfish’ royal families. If such a royal family took pains to highlight their wolfish connections, we must assume that wolves were not viewed as *all bad*, however overwhelming the textual evidence is to the contrary.

A study of place-names containing the wolf element yields other, less ambivalent results. Aybes and Yalben examined place names containing some wolf element in an attempt to assess the distribution and habitat of wolves (and the also extinct beaver) in Medieval England. They discovered a multiplicity of names containing the wolf element in England, over sixty in Scotland, and around twenty in Wales. The majority are found in the north of England: West Yorkshire, Cumberland, and Westmorland. The element can be found most commonly in conjunction with terms denoting woodland or hills, but it is also often connected to open areas, valleys, and tight places. The terms suggest that wolves had probably disappeared from the lower part of England by 1066, while they continued to

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<sup>66</sup> See Sam Newton’s *The origins of Beowulf and the pre-Viking kingdom of East Anglia* (Cambridge, England: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 108.

<sup>67</sup> See Carola Hicks’ *Animals in Early Medieval Art* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 68; and Newton, *The origins of Beowulf*, 108.

<sup>68</sup> Andy Orchard, *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend* (London: Cassell, 1997), 182.

proliferate in the uplands of the North Country, as place names continued to be given with wolf elements into them into the high medieval period.<sup>69</sup> This evidence points to the same large-scale slaughter of wolves in the more inhabited regions of England throughout the Anglo-Saxon period to the extent that these alpha predators eventually ceased to concern the inhabitants. This is corroborated by the fact that the most overwhelming occurrence of wolf place-names are those associated with wolf-pits, which were hazardous not only to wolves but to humans ignorant of their location.<sup>70</sup> Hooke reports that, according to the evidence provided by place-names, “wolves may have been captured in the pits recorded on the boundaries of Broadwas and Brendicot in Worcestershire, and others are noted in several Gloucestershire localities....In Devon, for instance, (wolf names) were associated with pits.”<sup>71</sup> This shows that wolf baiting and killing was a common activity during the Anglo-Saxon period, probably practiced by lower and upper classes alike.<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, although this is probably due to the wilder terrain of the North, the wolves continued to thrive in the Danelaw. The Anglo-Saxon migration marked the beginning of a campaign against large predators that would make serious inroads into the populations of these animals. Bears were the first to be annihilated; they were extinct from Great Britain by the year 1200, only one hundred and thirty three

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<sup>69</sup> Aybes and Yalben, “Place-name evidence,” 221-222.

<sup>70</sup> Pluskowski, *Wolves and Wilderness in the Middle Ages*, 205.

<sup>71</sup> Della Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1998) 28.

<sup>72</sup> See Almond 107 on the logistics of these pits.

years after the conquest.<sup>73</sup> Wolves survived longer, only becoming extinct at the end of the Middle Ages, but by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, as we have seen, they had been exterminated from all the more densely-populated southern regions.

So while human names appear to represent some degree of admiration for wolves, the place names demonstrate the more negative register of thoughts about wolves, since most of them are either associated with grounds where the beast was hunted or trapped, or with desolate tracts of land where one would be most likely to encounter them. This somewhat contradictory evidence points to an even larger sense of ambivalence which I argue the Anglo-Saxons felt about wilderness and wolves in particular.

### *Settlement, Wolves, and Wilderness*

The Anglo-Saxons had an uneasy relationship with wolves and bears – and by extension, with nature itself. Records show that these animals posed a serious emotional and physical threat to Anglo-Saxon communities. The island of Great Britain was relatively densely-wooded before full-scale clearance began after the conquest, haunted by wild beasts and, in the imagination of the Anglo-Saxons, the ghosts of the previous inhabitants. One of the most common lupine collocations, after the beasts of battle topoi, of course, are wood words with wolf words. See, for example, *Maxims* 2: “Wulf sceal in wudu,” *Elene*: “holtes gehleða,” and *Brunanburh*’s:

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<sup>73</sup> Quammen, *Monster of God*, 277.

“wulf on wealde” among many other examples.<sup>74</sup> Anglo-Saxons appear to have associated wolves with wooded areas. This could, of course be simply a poetic convention brought about by the convenient alliteration of the w-words wudu, weald, wulf, and wod. But whatever the case, the association existed, and it was powerful; mad (wod) wolves inhabit the woods, and anyone who lives in their habitat must take their company into account—and he must beware the maddening effects of their proximity. Alexander Pluskowski writes: “What is relatively clear is that medieval [Old] English and Scandinavian literature is not explicitly recording the distribution of wolves in the landscape, but points to a recurring conceptual link between the wolf and the woods that is ultimately ousted by a romance forest typically free of wolves.”<sup>75</sup> In subsequent chapters, I will argue that the romance forest, in England at least, was not as free of wolves as Pluskowski suggests, but his assertion about the conceptual link between wolves and woods in Old English and Old Norse literature is sound and thought-provoking. The reality of lupine habitat in Anglo-Saxon England is a little more complex; wolves tended to avoid densely occupied areas, but they did not seem to prefer woodland, to say, moorland. According to Pluskowski, “Wolves responded to the distribution of permanent human activity by selecting sheltered and relatively inaccessible environments.

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<sup>74</sup> *Max II 18b, Elene 114a, Brun 65a*. Unless otherwise noted, all OE poetic citations come from George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon poetic records: a collective edition*, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931-1953).

<sup>75</sup> Pluskowski, *Wolves and Wilderness in the Middle Ages*, 27.

Whilst in some cases this would have been moorland and upland, most often it was likely to have been stretches of woodland of varying character.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, in this study we will encounter wolves and outlaws in close quarters in all three of these remote habitats, although, as Pluskowski’s conclusions suggest, the most common locale will consistently remain woodland, from the earliest Anglo-Saxon references all the way to early modern plays about bestial outlaws. Their relationship with the wilderness would play an important part in the way they were approached by human settlers, who found it imperative to conquer that wild space symbolized by those wild predators

Anglo-Saxons came to a landscape that had been inhabited for millennia, and they knew it. Nicholas Howe argues that the Anglo-Saxons knew that they had inherited the British Isles. By ‘inherit’, he explains that “one is not the first in a primordial or virgin world; it means that landscape always comes with history attached to it, or if that seems too strong a claim, that landscape comes with signs of prior occupation that can and often must be interpreted historically.”<sup>77</sup> Howe notes that “the Anglo-Saxon accounts of place in Bede or the Chronicle have none of the innocence that marks Geoffrey of Monmouth’s account of the island... [Bede] tells us only that the island was more fertile and clement than were their homelands in northwestern Europe and thus they stole it away from the Celtic Christians.” Unlike

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<sup>76</sup> Pluskowski, *Wolves and Wilderness in the Middle Ages*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Howe and Wolfe, *Inventing medieval landscapes*, 91.

the American myth of pristine land, Anglo-Saxons “did not know the luxury of an island without prior inhabitants; their story of place had always to deal with the intertwined acts of possession and dispossession, both as a historical fact and as future possibility.” Therefore, he concludes, they had to invent new meaning for the landscape: “to order the natural terrain, or to impose organizing divisions on it, so that it becomes a human creation.”<sup>78</sup> One of their goals, therefore, was to treat the land in such a way that it became more comfortably theirs. In his work *Monster of God*, David Quammen observes that

the extermination of alpha predators is fundamental to the colonial enterprise, wherever that enterprise occurs. It’s a crucial part of the process whereby an invading people, with their alien forms of weaponry and organized power, their estrangement from both the homeland they’ve left and the place where they’ve fetched up, their detachment and ignorance and fear and (in compensation for those sources of anxiety) their sense of cultural superiority, seize hold of an already occupied landscape and presume to make it their own.<sup>79</sup>

Understanding this colonial conquest of nature is fundamental to an understanding of the Anglo-Saxons’ uncomfortable relationship with alpha predators as part of “a campaign by which the interlopers, the stealers of a landscape, try to make themselves comfortable, safe, and supreme in unfamiliar surroundings.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Howe and Wolfe, *Inventing medieval landscapes*, 91-93.

<sup>79</sup> Quammen, *Monster of God*, 253.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

The Anglo-Saxon rhetoric about wolves and bears intensifies during the worst years of the Viking invasion, probably a reassertion of that initial colonial enterprise in the face of the insecurity of the previously occupied British landscape.<sup>81</sup> I quote Quammen's analysis of this colonial process in America as a war against grizzly bears full because I believe it clarifies a great deal of what is happening a millennium earlier in England. He notes the "murderous loathing that many ranchers (of European extraction) in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho continue to harbor for the grizzly bear." He argues that to the white ranchers and farmers:

At some subliminal level, the grizzly bear is perceived as a guerilla warrior, fighting the final noisome skirmishes in a war of territorial seizure that began with Lewis and Clark, continued with the great cattle drives up the Bozeman Trail, and reached its provisional culmination with the surrender of Chief Joseph and his harried remnant of Nez Perce in the Bearpaw Mountains. The war won't be over, not quite, until the last individuals of the animal once known as *Ursus arctos horribilis* have been eradicated from the northern Rockies and the forests (on public land as well as private) are safe for the white people and their cows.<sup>82</sup>

To the Anglo-Saxonist, this whole passage has a ring of familiarity to it. Wolves and bears, representatives of the heathens on the border of the Anglo-Saxon farmer's cattle ranges and clearings, share an imaginative space with the people they have driven to the border spaces, and until the last wolf and bear has been exterminated,

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<sup>81</sup> C.f. the sermons of Wulfstan, the Life of St. Edmund, and the article "The Norse in England," in Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf, eds. *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1993), 166.

<sup>82</sup> Quammen, *Monster of God*, 233-34.

assimilated, or pushed to the margins of the British Isles where they can dwell with other marginalized entities, their entire colonial enterprise cannot stand secure.<sup>83</sup>

Achieving military victory over the indigenous tribes, whoever they are, is sometimes the easiest part of the whole process. The land itself, the ecosystem, must be defeated too – or so the invaders think. The foreign wilderness must be mastered, made tractable, if not utterly subdued and transformed. That requires, at the lower end of the size scale, coping with pestiferous local microbes and parasites, which sometimes present the fiercest resistance of all. Malaria certainly slowed the white conquest of Africa. At the upper end of the scale, it means rooting out those big flesh-eating beasts that rule the woods and the rivers and the swamps, that offer mortal peril to the unwary, and that hold pivotal significance within the belief systems of the natives....You haven't conquered a people, and their place, until you've exterminated their resident monsters (234).

Anglo-Saxons were not only conquering the natives' monsters, they were also overcoming parts of themselves that might have venerated these beasts. Some evidence points to veneration of the wolf and bear by Pre-Christian Germanic tribes.<sup>84</sup> The Anglo-Saxons needed to conquer the remnants of the belief system that held these alpha predators sacred, and as long as they roamed the wilderness,

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<sup>83</sup> See Siewers' article "Landscape of Conversion" in which he discusses the wetlands and fens specifically as places of refuge for indigenous people: "The moors and monsters in *Beowulf* and the fens and fiends in the Guthlac tales can be seen as landscape narrative both of conquest and possession, and of the formation of cultural identity" (11). He argues that "archaeological evidence for Post-Roman survival of a British population in the Lincoln area and a British name in the genealogy of the kings of Lindsey are all indicators of a lingering presence of indigenous culture in the region neighboring the Mercian-dominated fenlands of Middle and East Anglia" (13). In Guthlac "the view of the fens is much how one imagines the perspective of a culture constructing itself as both dominant and imposed, viewing a "backward" indigenous people living in an ecosystem that is not compatible with the emerging polity's imposition of order, and thus not well understood" (14).

<sup>84</sup> See H.R.E. Davidson, "Shape-changing," 132.



hurting people and their domestic animals, people's sense of awe and fear, which often borders on religious wonder, could not be entirely overcome.

Part of this enterprise of conquest, then, lay in the reinforcement of the oppositional values of center versus periphery. Harald Kleinshmidt notes that, in the early medieval world, "the physical environment was seen to be in opposition to the man-made environments, displaying little more than a constraining framework for human action."<sup>85</sup> Perceptions of the world as a constant bringer of pain – toothaches, broken bones, disease, and the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to – created a need for the individual body to belong to a larger group:

"Among the common people, the perception of the human body as poor, frail, weak and subject to pressures and restrictions from the physical environment shaped their heterodynamic mode of behaviour... The pressures and restrictions imposed by the physical environment could only be resisted or overcome through the association of persons into groups under the leadership of an extraordinary person with outstanding capabilities."<sup>86</sup> The ordering process required clear labels of what was 'in' or 'out', in terms of the claiming of the land. This results in the valorization of notions of community and civic space over those of isolation and wilderness.

Nicholas Howe argues that in their imagining of space, Anglo-Saxons related their topography with their "psychological and spiritual lives," and thus "the seemingly

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<sup>85</sup> Harald Kleinschmidt, "Space, Body, Action: The Significance of Perceptions in the Study of the Environmental History of Early Medieval Europe," *Medieval History Journal* 3, no. 2 (2000): 189.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-207.

stable distinctions between the 'in here' of the self and the 'out there' of the landscape [were] sometimes...crossed or confused for expressive purposes."<sup>87</sup> This mapping of cultural life onto the topography had some very real consequences, one of which was the notion of pushing unwanted people 'out there' and then placing them in the same category as the inhabitants of that same space (beasts). People who did not mold well to this heterodynamic had to be forcibly pushed out of the 'civilized space' into that hostile and alien world of malignant nature.

The Anglo-Saxons lived in a cold climate with many infectious diseases, dangerous beasts, and dangerous weather, and as Jenifer Neville puts it, "under such circumstances, a fearful defensiveness with respect to natural phenomena may appear inevitable: wind and precipitation battered against flimsy structures erected as defense, disease struck with its invisible weapons, the vegetable world opposed human beings in their need to eat, small animals leached away that which was wrestled from the land, and wolves haunted the wilderness."<sup>88</sup> Thus, she argues, the Anglo-Saxons viewed the natural world, itself a tangled web of Christian, Germanic, Latin science and philosophy, as an enemy, an oppositional force against which their civilization stood, tenuously. "The representation of the 'natural' world is never an end in itself and is always ancillary to other issues."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Howe and Wolfe, *Inventing medieval landscapes*, 91. See also Sarah Semple's "Illustrations of Damnation in late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts," *Anglo Saxon England* 32, no. 1 (2003): 231-246.

<sup>88</sup> Neville, *Representations of the natural world*, 7.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Nature in Anglo-Saxon poetry is postlapsarian, and Neville asserts that Adam's exile is the central myth in this scheme; nature "stands as a negative mirror for human capability, its power reflecting the unstated but apparent lack of human power."<sup>90</sup> We see this in nearly all the elegiac poems. Moreover, as shown in both gnomic wisdom literature like *Maxims I* and in homiletic literature, humankind is situated on both horizontal and vertical planes: below Heaven and above Hell, and surrounded on all sides by nature.<sup>91</sup> This natural world, Neville stresses, is amoral, but can represent good or evil in its state of order or disorder. The 'set' creation of the measurer thus contrasts with the monstrous wastes. Neville compares 'Anglo-Saxon poetry' to contemporary texts more dependent on Latin tradition, like the *Liber Monstrorum*, *Letters of Alexander to Aristotle*, and *The Wonders of the East*, which fixate on fantastic and dangerous animals which must be killed in order for human beings to be safe. But Alexander is able to do away with all of his assailants with relative ease, while the protagonists of many Anglo-Saxon poems seem powerless in the face of terrifyingly powerful nature.<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, the woods of Anglo-Saxon England were not ineffable loci of fear and mystery. According to Della Hooke:

The old idea of a land richly clad in primeval woodland awaiting the incursions of the Anglo-Saxons was rejected long ago but has taken rather longer to dislodge from the popular image. Aerial

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 34.

photography over the last few decades has revealed that enormous areas of prehistoric England were laid out under field systems and boundary divisions which stretched for mile and mile through open countryside. Agriculture certainly experienced many vicissitudes and might expand and retract under different economic and social pressures but there can have been little 'wilderness' that had not been drawn into the regional economy. Woodland and pasture were valuable assets and, as such, were closely managed.<sup>93</sup>

So the Anglo-Saxons were not confronted with a raw wilderness that they felt they could not control. In fact, it seems to be quite the obverse: they felt they had taken possession of a land that had already been cultivated and prepared for them. There did appear to be some areas of completely unmanaged waste, often on boundaries or in difficult geographical regions.<sup>94</sup> It seems safe to assume that such unmanaged wilderness regions might have also been refuges for the wolves who so terrorized the agricultural Anglo-Saxons. Interestingly, the large woodlands which were not managed agriculturally also seemed to be places of refuge for Briton culture long after the fifth century. Place names in the woodlands of the Chilterns, which range from Dorchester to Bedfordshire and Herefordshire are largely British in origin, and support Gildas' descriptions of the British hiding in "the densest woods to escape the incoming Anglo-Saxons in the early years of the take-over" and suggest that they maintained their way of life in those dense forests, which had never been cultivated,

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<sup>93</sup> Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England*, 139.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

even during the Roman occupation, for quite a long time.<sup>95</sup> So, we see, the forest is a place for refuge as early as Gildas: So the displaced Britons and the wolves and bears seem to have shared habitat, a fact that the Anglo-Saxons clearly understood, as we can see by the number of references to the exiled Britons living with and like wild beasts in the darkest forests found in Anglo-Saxon writings and into the centuries following the migration to England. In fact, this simile was to become a famous literary set-piece, an effective trope used for effect in works whose authors wanted to emphasize the desolation and horror of exile.

Furthermore, growing millennialism, a rise in Viking attacks, and a concern with the tenacity of paganism led to a rise in Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with eternal torment and punishment in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, as one can see from the homilies of Ælfric and Wulfstan, and their projection of that torment onto the English landscape, as Sarah Semple points out in her analysis of the images in the Harley 603 Psalter, show that the Anglo-Saxons had a tendency to see pockets of Hell in the physical landscape. <sup>96</sup> Copyist F depicts the entrance to Hell as “small rocky openings and earth-covered pits.” This makes them more immediate and less mythical, literally “under one’s feet” Copyist F also includes some interesting scenes of decapitated and amputated figures either on or in the mounds and rocky hills. Semple relates these images to the laws of the period which often prescribed

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>96</sup> Semple, “Illustrations of Damnation in late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts,” 231-246.

amputation or even decapitation for theft. The twisted and contorted body found in another illustration seems to be showing the actual practice of strangulation or decapitation of a criminal within a grave; several bodies have been found in similar positions in the 19 known Anglo-Saxon execution graveyards. Thus, the artist was accurately depicting the landscape of corporal punishment in his world and relating them to notions of criminality, exile, and natural spaces.<sup>97</sup> Semple argues that these visual innovations are all to emphasize the fact that Hell just isn't that far away. She also points to evidence in Anglo-Saxon prose and poetry of a deep-seated superstitious terror of prehistoric barrows.<sup>98</sup> In other words, the demonizing of pre-Christian burial sites led to their depiction in Christian illumination as loci of demonic activity literally places of Hell on earth. And this is the habitat of both wolves and outlaws.<sup>99</sup>

As we can see, this deep structure of simultaneous aesthetic appreciation and demonization is acting upon the cultural perceptions of outlaws and wolves. We see in the attitudes we have explored here an ambivalence towards wolves in the landscape, ambivalent literature about them, and ambivalence towards the humans who behave like them.

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<sup>97</sup> Semple, "Illustrations of Damnation in late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts," 236-238.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>99</sup> See *Maxims I*: 144-147.

### *Four Bestial Exiles*

I have defined four different types of bestial exiles or outlaws in Anglo-Saxon literary tradition as it is preserved, each portraying some aspect of a complex cluster of ideas and motifs dealing with exile and animality, most of which will be passed down into later tradition. I have classified the various Old English works thus:

1. The Cannibalistic Exile
2. The Wretched Exile
3. The Wolfish Trickster
4. The Bestial Hero

Some works may feature figures which fall under more than one of these categories, but I have placed each under its primary category and then mentioned it briefly under its secondary categories. See, for example, *Daniel*, which displays aspects of three different categories: cannibalism, wretched exile, and wolfish trickster, but its main category is — I believe — that of the wretched exile. It is therefore important to recognize that this is simply a clarifying classificatory system, and is in no way intended to suggest that this material is at all cut and dry. On the contrary, the bestial outlaw is a very fluid and protean motif, and aspects of it will spill over into other traditions.

### *Cannibal Hounds*

The Anglo-Saxons were concerned with dietary issues, probably in part due to their identification with the Ancient Israelites, with all their dietary restrictions

and laws.<sup>100</sup> Anglo-Saxons may have followed many of these dietary restrictions, but the one that seemed most to have caught their attention was that against drinking blood and consuming raw flesh. Anglo-Saxon writers return over and over to this theme, betraying a fascination that moves beyond the usual Christian concerns over the paradox of the communion, in which one eats Christ's actual flesh and blood.<sup>101</sup>

This obsession with raw flesh seems deeply connected with another Anglo-Saxon obsession: cannibalism. Outsiders – pagans, Vikings, (who are not cannibals, but who are perceived as bloodthirsty savages, as we will see later in this chapter) Africans, and giants – share one quality: the love of human flesh. These outsiders are often portrayed as canid in form. The *Beowulf* manuscript, a compendium of cannibalism, is replete with images of flesh-eating monsters who are also, in some way, either dog- or wolflike. Grendel and his mother are the most memorable examples of wolflike cannibals, but St. Christopher – admittedly not an Anglo-Saxon imaginative creation – with his dog head, belongs to this constellation of canine anthropophagy, as do the cannibals of 'Alexander's Letter to Aristotle' and 'the Wonders of the East. Other Old English works also concern themselves with man-eating anthropomorphic canids. Andreas is full of wolf imagery in its depictions of

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<sup>100</sup> I.e. Leviticus 17:10-15, and Deuteronomy 12:16-23, 15:23.

<sup>101</sup> See Fred Robinson's "Lexicography and Literary Criticism: a caveat," 101-103, in which he explores the obsessive fixation of such influential figures as Bede, Ælfric, Alfred, and Wulfstan on the taboo of blood consumptions. See also Orchard's *Pride and Prodigies* for a discussion of cannibalism and monstrosity especially chapters 2 and 3: "The Monsters of Beowulf" and "The Kin of Cain," pp. 28-57, 58-85.



the bestial cannibalistic Mermidonians. Finally, the Vikings are repeatedly portrayed as wolflike destroyers of men – the wolf image hinting at that horrid devouring of settlements, dwellings, and land. But when it comes to anthropophagy, there is only one text to begin with. It makes sense to begin this study of the bestial outlaw with the most famous Anglo-Saxon example: the cannibalistic exiles in *Beowulf*.

### *Beowulf*

Grendel and his mother, cannibalistic ogres, or perhaps mane-eating humans, are described repeatedly using wolfish imagery. They inhabit the 'wulfhleopu,' the habitat of wild creatures, outlaws, and monsters. Grendel's mother is described as a 'brimwulf' and both monsters are described using compound epithets that make use of the element \*warg, which is arguably connected with wolfishness in Old English: Grendel's mother is a grundwyrge, a ground-warg; Grendel a heoruwearh, a slaughter-warg. Old Norse and other Germanic languages use this word to describe both criminals and wolves, although, as E.G. Stanley points out, this does not seem as clear in Old English.<sup>102</sup>

These monsters are, before all else, bestial outlaws. They belong to the race of Cain, the first outlaw, doomed to lurk forever outside God's frið, a fate most horrific to Anglo-Saxon minds, and one which causes them to fixate upon the notion of the

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<sup>102</sup> But consider the language used to describe Cain's outlawry and Adam and Eve's exile: (bist awyrged betweox eallum nytenum" (cursed are you above all cattle, Genesis 3.14); and after the killing of Abel: "Nu þu bist awirged ofer eorðan.")

Race of Cain, the most wretched of all outlaws. Grendel's pathetic exile, in pain and torment, is the focus of the Beowulf-poet to the extent that one wonders whether some sympathy lies behind his descriptions of the monster's perdition.

One of the most convincing syntheses of the monster material in the *Beowulf* MS is performed by Andy Orchard in his *Pride and Prodigies*. Building in part on work done by Robert Kaske in his "The Eotenas of Beowulf," in which he finds that there is "a fairly regular progression from monsters to men" in the use of giant-related words in the narrative of *Beowulf*, Orchard makes a very strong case for the interrelatedness of animality, monstrosity, exile, and heroism.<sup>103</sup> He also sees the monsters and heroes on a sort of continuum of humanity and monstrosity, with the monsters often becoming humanized and *vice versa*. As Orchard persuasively argues, the "old heroes are demonized" in the new literary retellings of their stories.<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, this demonization also pushes them into the territory of the bestial outlaw. Because these heroes lack knowledge of God, and are thus outside his law, and they explore the monsters' territory in such a brutal way, as well as exhibit headstrong pridefulness, they become increasingly associated with the kind of lonely, pointless individualism and monstrosity of the bestial outlaw.<sup>105</sup> He shows that the job of the 'land-cleanser,' performed by such bestial heroes as Beowulf,

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<sup>103</sup> Robert Kaske, "The Eotenas of *Beowulf*," in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. Robert P. Creed (Providence: Brown University Press, 1967), 301.

<sup>104</sup> Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 169-170.

<sup>105</sup> Orchard notes that the language of exile is first applied to Grendel, but by the end of the poem, the same terms are being used to describe Beowulf himself. *Pride and Prodigies*, 31-32.

Alexander, and Judith, is an ambiguous one, often pushing the cleanser into unclean territory.<sup>106</sup> (This will also be true of William the Conqueror, Grettir, Fulk Fitz Wayn, and Hereward). The result of this paradox is predictably that “one might simply observe that in *Beowulf*, as in *Grettis Saga*, the initial distinction between the worlds of monsters and men become increasingly blurred.”<sup>107</sup> Orchard also observes that the animalistic nature of Beowulf is emphasized by the bear (and I would also argue, the wolf): “the shadow of the bear hangs also over Beowulf.”<sup>108</sup>

In spite perhaps, of intentions to the contrary, *Beowulf's* political message is indistinct, in some measure due to the complicated animal imagery arguably brought in by the bestial outlaw tradition. The lore of the outlaw, which explores the complex of wild motifs and dwells on the natural, has deeply influenced Beowulf, and arguably changed the course of the narrative. The power of *Beowulf* lies then, in part, in just this paradoxical response to Beowulf and the monsters – we admire them and fear them. They are disgusting and glorious. But what they represent is

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<sup>106</sup> Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, discussed on page 163.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 147. In what is perhaps his most interesting chapter, Orchard goes on to reassert the connection between the stories of Beowulf and Grettir, arguing that they are thematically related, and deeply similar in tone and meaning, and that they should be read in tandem to better clarify their common themes. According to Andy Orchard, *Grettis Saga* is “A five-act tragedy, in which the hero begins by battling ravaging monsters (episodes [1] and [2]), is cursed (episode [3]), and ends up transformed into a monster himself, killed, Harris has noted, as only monsters can be (episode [5]) (143). Both Beowulf and Grettir rely on their “brute strength and sæx, both weapons associated more with monsters than with men” and instruments of violence specific to the bestli outlaw genre (150). Finally, he concludes: “That at the end of his life Grettir has been independently identified with both Beowulf the hero and Grendel the monster underlines the ambiguous aspects of his nature which has become more apparent as the saga has progressed” (165).

unclear, and what starts out seeming like a pretty standard hero versus monster story quickly becomes murky and problematic. This is a very typical result of the force the outlaw tradition brings to bear on poetic composition. But Grendel and his mother are not the only cannibalistic, wolfish outlaws populating Old English poetry, and I turn now to other examples, since plenty of work has already been done on the bestial/monstrous aspects of the Grendelkin's exile.

### *The Wretched Exile: Wolves' Companion*

In his analysis of the Old English exile lyrics, Stanley Greenfield identifies four main characteristics of the elegies:

Despite the fact that the exile figures are so different in kind and character (I shall return to this point later) - a woman, Cain, an historical king, Satan, a seafarer, a devil, a lordless thane, a *peregrina*, a traveler to the unknown bourne - the expressions of their plights are clearly cast in similar molds. The patterns in each of the above groups (A, B, and C) are quite distinct; yet there are noticeable overlappings between the groups. Analysis of these images reveals that the Anglo-Saxon singer was concerned primarily with four aspects or concomitants of the exile state:

1. Status (e.g., *wineleas wrecca*, A1 and A2)
2. Deprivation (e.g., *Lande bereafod*, B1; *hreora bedæled*, C1)
3. State of mind (e.g., *hean and earm*, B2; *hean-mod*, C1)
4. Movement in or into exile (e.g., *wunode wræce-lastum*, B1).<sup>109</sup>

To this list of requisites I would add a fifth: the unfulfilling and sometimes actively dangerous companionship of animals, a state that seems to be a consistent reality of

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<sup>109</sup> Stanley B. Greenfield, "The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of 'Exile' in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," *Speculum* 30, no. 2: 201.

exile, both factual and fictional, throughout the medieval period. In his article on animals and exile, Umberto Albarella points out that “The concept of exile, which expresses abandonment and separation, is curiously also connected with that of companionship [with animals].”<sup>110</sup> Most of the Anglo-Saxon literature of exile speaks of the exile’s animal companions – and having an animal companion is, to a certain extent, oxymoronic. It seems that the Anglo-Saxons fundamentally viewed animals as instruments, not as companions, since they derive no satisfaction or comfort from their presence in their exile, and actively deplore or fear their intrusive presence in their suffering, if we use the tone of the exile lyrics as a benchmark. For example, the speaker in the *Wanderer* laments the presence of the seabirds who interrupt his meditation, even they are the only living things that visit his world. This following section will explore the collocations in the exile poetry of human exile with animal companionship, showing that exile was fundamentally associated, even at this early period, with wolves in particular.

If the first type for the bestial cannibal outlaw was the figure of Cain, the first template for the wretched exiled companion of beasts is the exile of Adam and Eve. In *Genesis A*, Adam and Eve’s exile, the first in the world, is immediately marked as wolfish suffering. In their mournful cries (howls?) at their exile, they must now suffer hunger, sorrow, and *wolves*: “Nu sceal tearighleor on westenne witodes bidan,

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<sup>110</sup> Umberto Albarella, “Companions of our travel: the archaeological evidence of animals in exile,” in *Fauna and Flora in the Middle Ages*, ed. S. Hartmann (Frankfurt and Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 2007), 133.

hwonne of heortan hunger oððe wulf / sawle and sorge somed abregde."<sup>111</sup> It is interesting that the wolf should become the prime symbol of a postlapsarian world of suffering, a metonymy for the loneliness of exile from God. The mournful sound of howling wolves in the wastes must have influenced this development; such mysterious, piercing noise would surely become synonymous with and symbolic of exile and loneliness.

### *Wulf and Eadwacer*

Probably the most famous – and controversial – association between exile and wolfishness in Anglo-Saxon poetry is found in that moving and cryptic masterpiece, *Wulf and Eadwacer*. The palpable desolation and loneliness of this poem is intensified by the ambiguous name of the female speaker's beloved: "Wulf is on iegel, ic on oþerre," she mourns, and we wonder who this wolfish love might be.<sup>112</sup> The single element name 'Wulf' is both strong and unsettling, but we know that plenty of Germanic warriors bore wolfish names and were not immediately associated with the depravity, habits, or habitat of the outlaw. On the contrary, royal lines like the East Anglians proudly claimed kinship with wolves. But in *Wulf and Eadwacer* the name seems more appropriate in its more negative valence, as a descriptive name which implies outlawry, for we find that both Wulf and the speaker are exiled, at

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<sup>111</sup> *Genesis A*: 2276B-2279.

<sup>112</sup> All citations of *Wulf and Eadwacer* come from Anne L. Klinck's edition of *The Old English Elegies, a Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 92.

least figuratively. Although Wulf is likely outlawed, or at least living on the edge of the human world, the female speaker's sense of desolate separation from the man she cares for and her use of pathetic fallacy, a common motif of the exile elegies, identifies her, too, as an exile, although she may be physically housed with a group of people.<sup>113</sup>

Several critics have noted and examined the wolfish qualities of this poem before. Suzuki viewed it as a romantic poem about separated dogs, which is admittedly quite an odd interpretation, but does point to the fact that many critics have picked up on and tried to make sense of all these canine references in this poem – often with similarly surreal results.<sup>114</sup> Peter Orton too saw the poem as a study of anthropomorphized wolves.<sup>115</sup> Wolf and Pulsiano focused on the animalistic depiction of the 'hwelp' that is borne off to the woods.<sup>116</sup> While these readings are somewhat possible, it seems most likely that the wolf imagery is intended to identify the 'Wulf' character as an outlaw.<sup>117</sup> Joe Harris has convincingly argued that the *Wulf and Eadwacer* poem is part of a pan-Germanic complex of

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<sup>113</sup> The speaker does note, however, that she is on another island, like Wulf, so there is also the possibility that she too is physically outlawed.

<sup>114</sup> Suzuki Seiichi. "Wulf and Eadwacer: A reinterpretation and some conjectures," *Neophilologische Mitteilungen: Bulletin de la Societe Neophilologique/Bulletin of the Modern Language Society* 88 (1987): 175-85.

<sup>115</sup> Peter Orton, "An Approach to Wulf and Eadwacer," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 85, section c, no.9 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1985): 223-258.

<sup>116</sup> Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf, "The *hwelp* in *Wulf and Eadwacer*," *English Language Notes* 28, no.3 (1991): 1-9.

<sup>117</sup> See Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, 48; Carole A. Hough, "Wulf and Eadwacer: A Note on Ungelic," *ANQ* 8, no. 3 (1995): 5; and Richard Hamer, *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 84-5.

performances of exile. He connects it with other narratives of exile, especially *Hildebrandslied*, *Helgi Hundingsbani*, and *Guðrunarkviða*.<sup>118</sup> The following close reading will add further support to this idea by placing the poem further within the context of the bestial outlaw tradition. This is, of course, a speculative reading as the difficult syntax and fragmentary nature of the poem will keep it forever enigmatic.

The speaker opens with the famously ambiguous lines: “Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gife; / willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.”<sup>119</sup> Although these lines could and have been read as referring to a previous section of the poem which is now lost which concerned a gift, it seems equally likely a reference to the object of the speaker’s concern, Wulf, who will be torn apart by her people if he should attempt to approach their group. The diction is powerful and brutal. The people feel that they have been given a *lac*, a gift – which can be read in a sacrificial sense – and we wonder what this gift might be.<sup>120</sup> The second line explains the nature of this gift. It is the life of the object of the speaker’s concern, Wulf. Her people wish to tear (aþecgan) him apart if he comes near. This desire is consonant

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<sup>118</sup> Joseph Harris, “Hadubrand's Lament. On the origin and age of elegy in Germanic,” in *Heldensage und Heldendichtung im Germanischen*, ed. H. Beck (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 81-114.

<sup>119</sup> “[The state of my] people is such as if they were being given a gift; / They will tear him apart if he comes into the troop” (1-2).

<sup>120</sup> On this word ‘lac’, see Peter Baker, “The Ambiguity of ‘Wulf and Eadwacer,’” *Studies in Philology* 78, no. 5 (1981): 40-41, who concludes that the only possible meaning of the word in this context is ‘gift’ and discards the previous readings of it as meaning ‘battle’, or ‘game’. See also Klinck, who argues in her edition to the poem that the secondary meaning ‘sacrifice’ is also implied in the poem (*The Old English Elegies* 169). This reading would mark Wulf as some sort of lamb to the slaughter, the unhappy victim of a too-bloodthirsty clan.



with the common treatment of outlaws, who could be dismembered and slaughtered just as wolves are when caught, as we have seen in the laws of the Anglo-Saxon kings. Klinck supports this reading: “Wulf is likely to be slaughtered by the speaker’s people if they catch him,” noting that the verb *aþecgan* has two primary meanings, to take, or to consume (eat). She argues that both meanings are in play here, as the troop intends to both ‘take’ the outlaw, albeit in a violent way, and to consume him – tear him apart and destroy him. She argues that “such a meaning also fits the present context and picks up the idea of *lac*.”<sup>121</sup> This passage must be read in parallel with the later lines 6a and b, which characterize the people as ‘*wælhreowe weras*.’ This is an ironic reversal of the standard imagery of the outlaw as bloodthirsty and bestial, and an early example of the motif of the hunter hunted.<sup>122</sup> The tribe is characterized as thirsty for the blood of the outlaw, a menacing group who wish not only to capture the outlaw, but in some ambiguous way, to consume him as a sacrifice; the speaker’s love for him causes her to ingeniously invert the binary of civilization and animality, as she shows the lawful group as more animalistic – and potentially cannibalistic – than the bestial outlaw himself. The outlaw morphology does not respect persons or politics, and often bestial traits shift from one figure to another within a very short span of time. This is not inconsistency, it is a result of this peculiar tradition, which resists linear or

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<sup>121</sup> Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, 170.

<sup>122</sup> C.f. my analysis of the bloodthirsty outlaws in *Andreas* in Chapter Four.

binary storytelling in favor of the indeterminate, the savage, the ambivalent and rhizomatic.

The speaker's sense of powerlessness and remoteness from the action is highlighted in the subsequent lines:

Wulf is on iege,        ic on oþerre.  
Fæst is þæt eglond,        fenne biworpen.  
Sindon wælreowe        weras þær on ige;  
willað hy hine aþecgan,        gif he on þreat cymeð.<sup>123</sup>

We get the sense of an impending inevitable, brutal, and fatal encounter. The outlaw is surrounded not only by fenland, but also by a hunting party of warriors, and the bloodthirsty men who are searching for him on the island will eventually find him, and then – note how the speaker's mind turns again to the ultimate consequence in her obsessive repetition of the line “willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð” – they will tear him apart. This sense of fate, inevitable death, and being surrounded by a hostile group in an unpleasant wilderness is, as I noted in the introductory chapter of this study, the most fundamental motif of the bestial outlaw tradition, and one, which, arguably, the audience might have recognized.

Loyal even in her enforced treachery, the speaker retains Wulf in her thoughts: “Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum dogode.”<sup>124</sup> In her defense of her

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<sup>123</sup> “Wulf is on an island, I on another / That island is surrounded tightly by fen. / There are slaughter-eager men on that island; / They will tear him apart if he comes into the troop” (3-5).

<sup>124</sup> “I dogged [followed] Wulf in my wide-ranging thoughts” (9).

editorial decision to retain the hapax legomenon ‘dogode’ instead of emending to ‘hogode,’ Klink argues that the use of the past-tense verb *dogode* intensifies the already prevalent canine imagery – the speaker, actively identifying herself with her exiled love, dogs him in her thoughts.<sup>125</sup> The adjective ‘widlastum’ echoes the physically far-ranging paths, *lastas*, travelled by the speakers of other exile elegies; we must read the speaker of this poem as identifying fundamentally with outlaws, even if she is not physically one; she does this by allying herself emotively with the figure ‘Wulf,’ through the pathetic fallacies she expresses, and through her very diction, which tends towards animal and exile words. Her love for the absent Wulf causes her pain, and this internal human pain is reflected by the external elements:

þonne hit wæs renig weder      ond ic reotugu sæt,  
þonne mec se beaducafa      bogum bilegde,  
wæs me wyn to þon,      wæs me hwæpre eac lað.  
Wulf, min Wulf,      wena me þine  
seoce gedydon,      þine seldcymas,  
murnende mod,      nales meteliste.<sup>126</sup>

It was rainy outside, and the speaker rained tears – here the causality is ambiguous.

It is unclear whether she sees the rain as part of her interior pain.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> See Klink, *The Old English Elegies*, 47.

<sup>126</sup> Then it was rainy weather, and I sat weeping [raining tears] / then the battle-bold one laid his arms around me-- / that made me feel bliss, but it was also hateful to me. / Wulf, my Wulf, my longing for you / made me sick for your rare visits / mournful in mood, although not meatless (9-15).

<sup>127</sup> On this see Klink, *The Old English Elegies*, 172, who argues that “a link between the woman and sympathetic nature is obviously intended in the OE.”

A second lover, a beaducafa, comes to lay his arms around the speaker, who is perhaps both pleased and disgusted by the pleasure he gives her.<sup>128</sup> I read this in the context of her guilty allegiance to the absent Wulf, whom she loves deeply and feels she is betraying through her relations with this other man. It is possible that this second lover is her guardian or husband, and his attentions are fitting within that context. The speaker's obsessive thoughts of Wulf point to a forbidden love, which makes sense when read in the context of outlawry. Perhaps the two sinned together and were both exiled for their misdeeds, although the legal partner of the speaker visits his wife due to prior ties like children. Perhaps Wulf alone was outlawed for some crime – not necessarily adultery, although it does seem likely.

The strange statement, 'nales meteleas', has puzzled scholars, who see it as a strange afterthought, a non-sequitur to the previous emotional statements.<sup>129</sup> The speaker's concern with food seems out of place to them. But when read in the context of the bestial outlaw, whose primary concern is where to get food and what kind of food may be available at any given point, this makes more sense. The speaker's concern with meat here is a guilty acknowledgement that her suffering is fundamentally less than her lost beloved, since she can eat and live in physical comfort. Her ambivalence towards her protector may have sparked this apparent

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<sup>128</sup> Others have read this as a love-triangle. The first to put forth the idea was Henry Bradley, in his article "The First Riddle of the Exeter Book," *Academy* 33 (1888): 198, and it has become the most dominant reading of the admittedly ambiguous poem.

<sup>129</sup> See, for example, P.J. Frankis, "Deor and Wulf and Eadwacer: Some Conjectures," *Medium ævum* 31, no. 3 (1962): 172.

non-sequitur; her acknowledgement of having found fleeting happiness in his arms sparks her sense of guilt and revulsion at her own, apparently inadvertent, treachery.

In the chilling final lines of the poem, the speaker addresses not Wulf but Eadwacer, presumably the guardian/lover 'beaducafa' who attempts to comfort the speaker in her sorrow for Wulf. She suddenly addresses him in the vocative, as if starting out of her mournful reverie, noting that the wolf has borne their whelp to the woods:

Gehyrest þu, Eadwacer?      Ucerne earne hwelp  
bireð wulf to wuda.  
þæt mon eaþe tosliteð      þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,  
uncer giedd geador.<sup>130</sup>

The term the female uses to describe their offspring, 'hwelp,' is unambiguously animalistic, probably disparaging, and specifically wolfish. Harrington has shown this term to be associated with Scandinavian legal terms for the children of outlaws. In *Grágás*, a *skógarmaðr's* son would be called a *vargdropi* (a wolf / outlaw's dropping).<sup>131</sup> The strangeness of this choice of words for a child in any other context than exile and outlawry strongly supports the claims that have been made over the years – and which I make again now – to place this poem in that context.<sup>132</sup>

Although E.G. Stanley makes a valiant effort to show that the term *warg* cannot be

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<sup>130</sup> "Do you hear, Eadwacer? Our miserable whelp / the wolf bears into the woods. / That can be easily destroyed [torn apart], that was never together / our sad song/story/life together."

<sup>131</sup> See Harrington 1996, 172.

<sup>132</sup> See Pulsiano and Wolf, "The 'Hwelp' in Wulf and Eadwacer," 1-9.

proven to mean 'wolf' in any extant Old English context, and thus that there is no provable connection between Old Norse and Old English legal terminology, this does hint at some missing link between Old English and Old Norse legal terminology which equates wolves and outlaws.

The speaker's attitude towards this event seems understated, even apathetic. To call one's child a whelp seems impersonal, even if it does illustrate some form of legal outlawry; the matter-of-fact way in which the speaker declares that this child is being borne to wood by a ravening and dangerous wolf, or a hostile if beloved outlaw, bears some examination. A possible and likely interpretation is that this child, a product of a union between the speaker and the protector figure Eadwacer, has never been an object of much concern to his mother, whose love for and allegiance to the outlawed Wulf precludes her engagement in mundane maternal matters, and, indeed, her ability to love or care for her own offspring by another. This is parallel with other tragic Germanic love stories with which the audience might be familiar, for example the disinterested or actively brutal parenting skills displayed by Signy and Gudrun, who are both married to enemies in the Volsung legend Queen Olof and her daughter Yrsa in the *HSK* legend. What the wolf, or Wulf intends to do with the child is a matter of some speculation. He could intend to kill the child in revenge for his love's having been taken by another, or perhaps he plans to raise the child with him as an outlaw in the woods in preparation for a more complete revenge to come, in which the child will help Wulf destroy his own father. Again, parallels with the Volsung legend seem particularly salient; the outlaw

Sinfjotli lives in the woods preparing to take revenge for the wrongs perpetrated against his family. As a member of the wolfish Volsung clan, which suffers bouts of outlawry throughout their cyclic legend, Sigmund and Sinfjotli, living in the woods and robbing people, have a history marked by extreme and brutal violence.

Sigmund and Sinfjotli come upon wolf skins in the woods and become ultra-powerful in their wolf forms, murdering countless men for their goods and money, and ultimately destroying Signy and her treacherous husband, who has been cuckolded by Signy. This enigmatic reference to the wolf bearing off the hwelp may be an allusion to a similar storyline known to the audience.

It is also interesting to think about the possibilities of the cultural work this passage does for its original Anglo-Saxon audience. If it is indeed an example of the *frauenlied* genre, potentially a song sung by and for women, it functions much as many lullabies do, as a dark dream of wish fulfillment, of a tragic freeing of the female subject from an unsatisfactory union through the brutal death of her child with her husband – the wolf has destroyed their pathetic progeny, and she is now free to leave or die.<sup>133</sup> The loss of the baby serves in this way as a fantasy of sudden freeing from the dull monotony and responsibility of adult womanhood, much in the same way as more modern lullabies often involve the sudden death or the threat

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<sup>133</sup> See Arnold E. Davidson, "Interpreting Wulf and Eadwacer," *Annuaire Mediaevale* 16 (1975): 24-32, on women's songs. Also see Joe Harris, "A note on eorðscræf/eorðsele and current interpretations of the wife's lament," *English Studies* 58, no. 3 (1977): 204-208.

of sudden death of the child being lulled to sleep.<sup>134</sup> The ability to escape from human moral codes is a central fantasy the brutal mechanisms of outlaw folklore provide. This reading diverges quite markedly from previous ones, which have seen the speaker's lament as a keening for a lost son. The tone of the speaker's remark, and the offhand way in which she notes the boy's loss, precludes this interpretation.<sup>135</sup>

Whatever the case, this short poem does have definite and demonstrable connections with the bestial outlaw tradition. When read in light of the motifs of betrayal, of exile into the waste, of ravenous hunger, of the inevitable fate of being hunted down and killed like a wolf, and of the explicit references to lupine behavior, it appears likely that a tale of bestial outlawry lies behind these cryptic, yet moving lyrics. If this poem is indeed a lyric based on a longer narrative, which seems fairly likely when one considers the use of two very specific names, (an unlikely move if this is meant to serve as a vague and anonymous stand-alone lyric) we can conclude that at least one outlaw narrative existed in Anglo-Saxon England, and that it was well-known enough to generate short poems like *Wulf and Eadwacer*, which are based on its storyline.

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<sup>134</sup> A popular example of this macabre fantasy of the infant's death is "Rock-a-bye Baby." See Marina Warner's *No Go the Bogeyman*, 195-199, for an analysis of the terrifying features of this and other lullabies.

<sup>135</sup> For arguments that this is a lament for a lost child, see Suzuki, "Wulf and Eadwacer," 176.



## *Wolves and Wisdom Poetry*

Sume wig fornom,  
ferede in forðwege,      sumne fugel opbær  
ofer heanne holm,      sumne se hara wulf  
deaðe gedælde,      sumne dreorighleor  
in eorðscræfe      eorl gehydde.<sup>136</sup>

Some of the most powerful, perhaps because they are the most reified, descriptions of the human exile as a companion of wolves, occur in the wisdom poetry of the Anglo-Saxons. In his monograph on the wisdom poems, Cavill argues: “Like maxims in other Germanic literature, they describe things, both concrete and abstract, in order to organize phenomena, society and indeed literature.”<sup>137</sup> The Gnostic poems are powerful iterations of conventional wisdom, especially when they establish the normative attitudes towards nature and humankind’s place within it. A fairly patriarchal genre, it tends to reinforce binary relations between good and evil, male and female, and human and animal, among other things. Things that do not fit in with the normative view of things are subjected to a process of distancing which marginalizes the unusual, dangerous, or atypical and emphasizes ways of thinking about the world that promote social stability.<sup>138</sup> For the purposes of this study, we must ask, how does nature function in these poems, and how does the exile’s place in the world or outside of it become reified in these cataloguing descriptions of ‘the way things are?’ Are the maxims more or less sensitive to the

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<sup>136</sup> The Wanderer, *ASPR*, 80b-84.

<sup>137</sup> Peter Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1999), 184.

<sup>138</sup> See Cavill, *Maxims in Old Poetry*, 109-111.

processes of the natural world? And, more specifically, how are dangerous creatures and people portrayed?

The extant gnomic poetry mentions wolves as part of topoi of either exile or suffering, using them as metaphors for exile, as well as warnings for what will befall the friendless man who is cast out of human society and seeks companionship in the realm of the animals. It holds up the human social bonds as the *sine qua non* in this life, as we see in a strongly affecting passage in *Maxims I*. First, the socially unacceptable person, the man who must live alone, is marginalized and made other through the use of the adjective ‘wretched.’<sup>139</sup>

earn se him his frynd geswicað.  
Nefre sceal se him his nest aspringeð, nyde sceal þrage gebunden.<sup>140</sup>

It is better to have a friend, to live in human society; he who travels with no human companion (i.e. an exile or outlaw) suffers a worse kind of companionship:

Wel mon sceal wine healdan      on wega gehwylcum;  
oft mon fereð feor bi tune,      þær him wat freond unwiotodne.  
Wineleas, wonsælig mon      genimeð him wulfas to geferan,  
felafæcne deor.      Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð;  
gryre sceal for greggum,      græf deadum men;  
hungre heofeð,      nales þæt heafe bewindeð,  
ne huru wæl wepeð      wulf se græga,  
morþorcwealm mæcga,      ac hit a mare wille.

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<sup>139</sup> Muir has found a fairly close parallel with this passage in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, which does not contain the mention of the dangerous beasts which may destroy the single man in the waste. Thus this seems to be an addition of the Anglo-Saxon poet and is thus very interesting as evidence of the kinds of automatic associations called up by the mention of exile.

<sup>140</sup> *Maxims I*: 37b-38.

Wræd sceal wunden,      wracu heardum men.<sup>141</sup>

Then the next few lines firmly establish the unenviable state of being completely friendless in this world, causing the audience to uncomfortably dwell upon the almost unimaginable loneliness of that state. But then, in classic gnomic form, the poem turns to the preferable situation, having a companion in the wild, thus offering relief and further reification of the audience's worldview: to be alone is bad, to have a brother is good.

Earm biþ se þe sceal ana lifgan,  
wineleas wunian      hafaþ him wyrd geteod;  
betre him wære þæt he broþor ahte,      begen hi anes monnes,  
eorles eaforan wæran,      gif hi sceoldan efor onginnan  
opþe begen beran;      biþ þæt sliphende deor.  
A scyle þa rincas      gerædan lædan  
ond him ætsomne swefan;  
næfre hy mon tomælde,  
ær hy deað todæle.<sup>142</sup>

In this hypothetical situation, the two men are companions in the hostile wilderness, where at any moment they may need to take on a dangerous bear or boar. Such encounters are not good, implicitly argues the poem, thus we must arm ourselves against this actively hostile nature by keeping other humans about us when we sleep and carrying weapons which make us superior to the slidende deor out there. Although this section successfully upholds and then destroys the possibility that survival alone in the world could be a good thing or could even be accomplished

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 144-152.

<sup>142</sup> *Maxims I*: 172-180a.

(think how far this attitude is from our own!) the unsettling knowledge of humankind's fundamental weakness remains. Humans must sleep together to remain warm, as well as to survive attack.<sup>143</sup> They must bear weapons about their bodies, while their beastly opponents are always equipped with their claws and tusks. And their unions are fragile. The human capacity for speech has the power to break those fragile bonds, subjecting the victims to a fate worse than death – subhuman aloneness outside the human universe. As we can see, the poet is exerting a lot of authorial control here; dangling the possibility of some sort of rapprochement between people and animals, a hybridity of sorts before the audience, then quickly exploding the possibility of such an approach.

Cavill makes a perceptive statement about the 'point' of the scary moments in the *Maxims* poems where human beings are shown in dangerous situations outside the comfortable realm of human experience. I will cite it in full here, since it informs my reading so much:

The poems wrestle with the marginal and terrifying situations that have the potential to destroy social reality, particularly death and aloneness. There is a consistent contrast between the singularity of God, which is good, and the aloneness of creatures which is bad. Keeping up friendships, having family and companions prevents the loneliness which leads to vulnerability against wild animals, or makes a man take wolves for friends, or live alone like the *pyrs* in the wasteland. Participating in the social rituals of conversations, worship, gift-giving and fighting is participating in a meaningful world. Being alone is a denial of meaning because meaning is socially

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<sup>143</sup> See ll. 176-180a.

constructed. Human beings as social animals need society and in its absence try to make friends with wolves which have no capacity for human meanings like friendship, compassion, or grief.

This reality of the gnomonic thoughtworld makes interaction with nature – although it happens often – rather one-sided. Nature exists only as protagonist or antagonist in a human-centered play of mortality. For example, *Maxims II*, in its incantatory iteration of ‘the way things are’ describes the natural ways of three animals, all of which are understood *through* the ways in which they interact with humans. The firm location of these animals within this verbal world map has serious implications. It demonstrates the active categorization of the non-human within human terms alone, turning something wild and other into something that has deep bearing upon human life and has no life outside this fictive habitat: “Hafuc sceal on glofe wilde gewunian, wulf sceal on bearowe, earm anhaga, eofor sceal on holte, toðmægenes trum.”<sup>144</sup> Just as hawks modify their law of kind by perching on the gauntlet of the hunter, so too the wolf lurks on the desolate woods, the places outside human control (and haunted by ghosts). This creates an interesting effect; these two rapacious animals react entirely differently to man’s intervention and control. The third animal, the boar, although he inhabits a nominally ‘wild’ space, the wood, is strong in his tooth-might – that is, he is dependent upon weapons. It is useful to note the different tonal registers for the various beasts – the hawk is an

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<sup>144</sup> *Maxims II*: 18b-20a.

intermediary between the world of men and animals, both in the wild and on a glove. The boar is anthropomorphized (as he often is) as a warrior who places his trust in his faithful weapons. But the wolf, again, inhabits those uncomfortable borderlands between the human and the [super]natural, waiting on the barrows of the ancient dead. The wolf is part of a triad here which does not neatly follow the pattern of the famous beasts of battle topos. The misery and loneliness of the wolf is emphasized here, and this arguably pushes the figure of the wolf into the human register of exile. It seems the traditional locus of exiles – both voluntary and involuntary – was these wild areas (consider Guthlac, Grendel, and the speaker in *Wulf and Eadwacer*) Although this is almost definitely a fiction, the power of the motif is undeniable, since it functions as a sort of inverted sanctuary, a profane place of protection – or lack of it, for the outcast.

The triad of animals here is an interesting one. The wolf is sandwiched between two ‘noble’ animals associated with hunting! The hawk on the glove and the boar in the wood are both deeply connected with the rituals of the hunt and thus with nobility. The wolf thus seems strangely out of place, as a ‘beast of waste and desolation’ with no real connection with the hunt.<sup>145</sup> The noble wolf which survives in names and certain legend doesn’t seem a candidate here either, since this wolf’s

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<sup>145</sup> Although wolves were hunted regularly, no evidence survives which suggests that they were elite quarry. In fact, the sheer number of wolf pit names dating back to the Anglo-Saxon period suggests that they were probably seen as vermin to be casually slaughtered using less-than-heroic methods.

habitat is so emphatically pagan burial sites. Thus the wolf's presence here in this triad of animals is to a certain extent, a *crux*, as the one in the list which does not belong. The wolf is the entry in the catalogue which upsets the simple relationship of human master to his animal dominion. The introduction of the uneasy picture of the exiled wolf vaguely unsettles the entire triad and does not allow the audience to rest comfortably in their knowledge of their place in nature. Rather, it subtly reminds them of a number of unpleasant possibilities of existence, when the human becomes subject to perdition, exile, unhappiness, unmanageable nature, and spaces which lie outside God's power and certainly outside his own.

This same unsettling beast lurks in the margins of *Maxims I*. The wolves of the waste, the most mercurial of all animals in the Anglo-Saxon worldview, become the ironic companions of the unhappy exile: "Wineleas, wonsælig mon genimeð him wulfas to geferan, felafæcne deor."<sup>146</sup> Interestingly here, the wolf – which is generally depicted alone in Anglo-Saxon poetry – is depicted somewhat more naturalistically as a pack animal when the poet notes that the exile will find wolves as companions. But these wolves are unexceptional otherwise; this is no Romulus and Remus story, where the human exile is taken in and improved upon, even turned into a hero, by his wolfish surrogate parents. In fact, this could be read as a consciously ironic negation of just such stories in the *bearsson* genre – Instead the

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<sup>146</sup> *Maxims II*: 146-147a.

hope of fellowship with beasts that was briefly held up is dashed when this ‘companionship’ turns into a nightmare.<sup>147</sup> Here we get a tantalizing hint of the ambiguity of tone which is such a trademark of the outlaw tradition. Of course, these new ‘friends’ turn upon him more often than not: “Ful oft hine se gefera slited; gryre sceal for greggum, græf deadum men; hungre heofed, nales þæt heafe bewindeð, ne huru wæl weped wulf se græga, morþorcwealm mæcga, ac hit a mare wille.”<sup>148</sup> And the wolves observe no funerary rites. This is a very important aspect of the motif of wolves in Anglo-Saxon England – they make it impossible for bodies to be buried intact. The horror of being eaten by beasts is arguably a fundamental human taboo, but being in exile and being eaten by beasts appears to be a more awful fate. The horror of death in exile goes beyond the fear of dying outside one’s *communitas*, culture, and family, although this seems a poignantly real danger to a community-minded Anglo-Saxon. Its true horror lies in the reality of the body decaying without the last rites or burial, for, as Robert P. Harrison notes in his study, *The Dominion of the Dead*, humans are so deeply concerned with burial ritual that the institutions of marriage and religious observance are more likely to be lost in a society than burial

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<sup>147</sup> “Oft halige menn wunedon on westene betwux repum wulfum & leonum: betwux eallum deorcynne & wrymcynne. & him nan ðing derian ne mihte: ac hi totæron þa hyrnedan næddran mid heora nacedum handum: & þa micclan dracan eaðelice acwealdon buton ælcere dare þurh godes mihte.” *ÆCHom* I, 6, B1.1.7.

<sup>148</sup> *Maxims II*: 147b-151.



customs.<sup>149</sup> A further horror still, then, is the notion of that corpse's being picked at by animals.

The same sort of wolfish monstrosity occurs in the *Fortunes of Men*. The lonely, luckless man is devoured by wolves, and no trace is left of him for humans to bury, a deep shock for his mother: "Sceal hine wulf etan, har hæðstapa; hinsip þonne modor bimurneð."<sup>150</sup> Again, the horror in this passage lies in the fact that the victim's mother must mourn his death without the comfort of knowing where his body lies. Theologians were concerned with the question of the fate of the human body after death, and one of the most fundamental questions was what happens to the missing limbs of a body. It is no surprise, then, that the theologically-minded Anglo-Saxons would be concerned and preoccupied with this difficult question.

These slaughter-greedy wolves of the gnomic literature do not act against their nature – or at least what is perceived to be their nature. This is a fact which bears noting, since the hope of a change in the behavior of wolves is prominently and ironically explored in so many of the wisdom poems, only to be gleefully and often grotesquely exploded by the poem, which revels in the reality of the situation for the exile – to be eaten by wolves. This ironic move was probably even more prevalent than we can imagine, judging from the number of times hypothetical wolfish companions turn against their human friends in the extant poetry remaining

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<sup>149</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xi.

<sup>150</sup> *The Fortunes of Men*: 12b-14a.

to us. If this motif was as ubiquitous as I believe it could have been, then the miracle of St. Edmund's preservation gains even more narrative power.

Homilies and other religious writings also show evidence of the currency of the equation of wolves with outlaws and exile. The most well-known instance of this is in the life of St. Edmund as written by Ælfric. This *Vita* is, admittedly, based on Abbo of Fleury's account, but the Old English vocabulary in Ælfric's account is of great interest to this project due to the high incidence of wolf-related words. In Ælfric's translation of Abbo's *Vita*, a complex of wolf-images infuse the entire narrative with an eerie otherness, giving this human drama a bestial power that would have otherwise been missing. The wolf is not only the focus of the great miracle of St. Edmund's preservation; it is also introduced into the narrative via the rapacious Vikings, who were often portrayed in Anglo-Saxon writings as wolfish outlaws. The Viking troops, certainly viewed by the Anglo-Saxons as criminals and outlaws – at least from God – are described as *sæwulfas*, characterized by their "wælhreownysse."<sup>151</sup> Their thirst for violence and slaughter is something which marks them as inhuman and monstrous.

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<sup>151</sup> "In the same year the pagans from the northern regions came with a naval force to Britain like stinging hornets and spread on all sides like fearful wolves, robbed, tore and slaughtered not only beasts of burden, sheep and oxen, but even priests and deacons, and companies of monks and nuns. And they came to the church of Lindisfarne, laid everything waste with grievous plundering, trampled the holy places with polluted steps, dug up the altars and seized all the treasures of the holy church. They killed some of the brothers, took some away with them in fetters, many they drove out, naked and loaded with insults, some they drowned in the sea. ..." Symeon of Durham, *History of the Kings*, ed. J. Stevenson (Dyfed: Llanerch Enterprises, 1987), 457.

‘Wolf’ is an element that can be used to signify a generic ‘foe’, not literally a wolf, it is true, but surely the association of Vikings with outlawry, as well as their special wilderness, the sea, could keep the notion of real wolves at the forefront. And, indeed, the simile is made again, more forcefully, in the descriptions of the Viking Hinguar’s acts of rapine: “And se foresæda Hinguar færlice swa swa wulf on lande bestalcode, and þa leode sloh weras and wif, and þa ungewittigan cild, and to bysmore tucode þa bilewitan Cristenan.”<sup>152</sup> In this passage, three major complexes of wolfish symbolism in Old English literature come together powerfully. Hinguar is an outlaw on English soil, yet he walks it, hunting for human lives. Like the devilish wolf in sheep’s clothing, he jubilantly destroys the lives of Christians. And the implications of his rapine, although he is not specifically described as man-eating, certainly have a cast of cannibalism about them, at least in the sense that he hunts and destroys other people. This horrific passage shows how powerful a simile comparing a dangerous human to a wolf can be, and also how deeply ingrained is this motif in the Western psyche; modern readers must certainly still experience that thrilling chill down the spine upon encountering this passage – the is the Big Bad Wolf who haunts the margins of our nightmarish fairy tales, and we know him well. Again, we have here another example of authorial control of what could be

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<sup>152</sup> Ælfric, “The Passion of Saint Edmund, King and Martyr,” in *Ælfric's Lives of Saints Part Two*, ed. Walter Skeat (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 316-17.

dangerously ambivalent lore. This outlaw is deeply negative – there is nothing appealing about the wolfish Hinguar.

After this complex of images has been reinforced by the Vikings' acts of violence and the martyrdom of Edmund, the wolf appears again, in a striking moment of inversion. The 'grim and grædig' outlaw wolf, symbol of ungovernable passion and bloodlust, reverses its nature and guards the severed head of the king between its paws: "Wæs eac micel wundor þæt an wulf wearð asend, þurh Godes wissunge to bewerigenne þæt heafod wið þa oþre deor, ofer dæg and niht."<sup>153</sup> A great wonder, indeed, that an exemplar of the species that so shortly before in the narrative had symbolized all the brutality of Viking depredations could now be made to guard a corpse! In his analysis of the wolf of St. Edmund and the other 'good wolves' who aid saints, Alexander Pluskowski argues that the fundamental point of this motif is to show God's power in "inciting wolves to behave, from a typically moralizing perspective, out of character."<sup>154</sup> And Ælfric is careful to reiterate exactly how out of character this is for the wolf: Þa læg se græga wulf þe bewiste þæt heafod, and mid his twam fotum hæfde þæt heafod beclypped, grædig and hungrig, and for Gode ne dorste þæs heafdes abyrian, and heold hit wið deor.<sup>155</sup> The wolf is still hungry and greedy, but he must not capitalize upon his possession of the head because God's hand lies heavy upon him. Nature is still red in tooth and

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>154</sup> Pluskowski, *Wolves and Wilderness in the Middle Ages*, 167.

<sup>155</sup> Ælfric, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints Part Two*, 324.

claw but is held at bay for a moment by the civilizing force of God, but the tension remains.

But the wonders still do not cease: “Pa wurdon hi ofwundrode þæs wulfes hyrdrædenne, and þæt halige heafod ham feredon mid him, þancigende þam ælmihtigan ealra his wundra; ac se wulf folgode forð mid þam heafde oþþæt hi to tune comon, swylce he tam wære, and gewende eft siþþan to wuda ongear.”<sup>156</sup> The wolf respects the very clear boundaries between the natural world and the human world. An outlaw from civilization, he stops short at the city gates and leaves the head in the care of the humans. This is a very interesting moment in the *Vita*, since it so clearly demonstrates the kinds of thinking about nature and town that make clear boundary lines. This wolf is sensitive to the imaginary paling put up by human beings between civilization and wasteland. His sensitivity to these distinctions is a further miracle, a fantasy of a world in which human-made (and God-supported) distinctions between the world of man and the rest of unruly creation are understood and respected by all, a world of order much like the fantastic paradises glimpsed in such otherworldly poems as the *Phoenix*. Again, this is a highly controlled playing with what could be very unruly motifs. The author has all the dangerous motifs in hand, and his inversion of very simple binary maintains a very straightforward story whose meaning is clear. He is playing with fire, but he keeps it

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 325.

well under control. His straightforwardness demonstrates a perhaps a certain anxiety to control dangerous folkloric elements.

Now we will deal with the last two categories of animality in the Anglo-Saxon period briefly, since they will become the focus of much of the rest of this monograph.

### *The Satanic/Wolfish Trickster and The Bestial Hero*

This story of St. Edmund and the wolf leads us naturally to a third category of wolf lore which appears quite often in the Anglo-Saxon records, and is one that is emphatically not native to England or lay folklore, but rather represents a very old tradition indeed, dating back at least to the days of the Old Testament. The practice of depicting bad people – bad teachers, bad clerics, bad kings, the devil, tricksters of various sorts – as wolves among sheep is a time-honored clerical tradition, and the Anglo-Saxons clearly felt no need to suppress it. In fact, the frequency of this kind of reference is such that it appears likely that this rhetorical approach appealed to A-S churchmen in particular. Why this may be is probably due in part to the fact that other images and interpretations of lupine power and danger proliferated on the island, and use of this motif both tapped into and tempered the power of those separate traditions. I chose to examine this thematic equation of bad men with wolves because it bears so directly on the native outlaw tradition, and the two intersect and combine in interesting ways with far-reaching consequences.

Although the tone of outlawry – insofar as the deeply interwoven threads of

patristic and folkloric motifs can be untangled — is never positive, since the banished figure is outside the law of God and Man because he has forfeited his right to classification as human, the cross-fertilization of this lupine outlaw figure with that of the wolfish churchman yields unusual results.

The final figure in this exploration of the motif of bestial outlawry in Anglo-Saxon England also seems like the most out of place in this lineup of sinners, maneaters, and criminals. But in order to understand the generally heroic figure of the bestial outlaw within the larger context of medieval English literature, we must explore the ways in which Anglo-Saxon hero figures *are* portrayed as bestial. Luckily, much of this work has been done by others.<sup>157</sup> These scholars have fairly conclusively linked the literary heroes of the Anglo-Saxons with monstrosity and/or animality, and it seems likely that the audiences of these poems were very aware of the thin line between heroism and monstrosity. All that remains for me to do is to connect the hero figure with the bestial outlaw tradition. Unfortunately, no poems of great hero-outlaws remain to us, although some are certainly alluded to in *Deor* and *Widsið*, but such heroes do exist in other Germanic traditions, and one in particular, Sigurð or Sigmund, certainly was a story frequently shared among Anglo-Saxon

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<sup>157</sup> See, for example, Raymond W. Chambers, "Beowulf's Fight with Grendel and its Scandinavian Parallels," *Scandinavian Studies* 4, no. 4 (1929): 279-294; F. Panzer, *Studien zur germanischen Sagensgeschichte, I: Beowulf* (N.p.: Munich, 1910); and Margaret Arendt, "The Heroic Pattern: Old Germanic Helmets, Beowulf and Grettis Saga," in *Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium*, ed. Edgar C. Polomé and Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 130-99.

audiences, since we hear of him in two separate poems as well as find parts of this story on various artifacts, from coins to caskets. The closest we come to a real hero-outlaw in Old English is Saint Guthlac, who literally grapples with his demons in order to establish a space for sanctity in a heathen environment, but the many topoi of bestial outlawry that appear in that poem suggest that the poet was trying to align Guthlac with such heroes as Sigurð and Beowulf.

### *Conclusion: A Tradition Established*

In conclusion of this exploration of the figure of the bestial outlaw in Anglo-Saxon literature, there are four main categories into which a specific figure may fall: the cannibalistic exile, the wretched exile, the wolfish trickster, and the bestial hero. As these forays into the tangled web of animal symbolism have shown, it is never easy to categorize a figure as simply one of these things. For example, Grendel and his mother are at the same time cannibalistic and wretched exiles, and certainly they fall into the devilish trickster category as well. Although we can boast of no extant heroic epic of outlawry, these many tales and poems incorporating aspects of bestial exile remaining to us in Old English point to a firmly rooted tradition of portraying exiles as wolfish. This controlled but ubiquitous tradition will explode outward into a veritable flowering of the outlaw figure in the fecund literary world of Post-Conquest England, a process which shall be the focus of following chapters. Nebuchadnezzar, too, embodies aspects of all these figures. In his confrontation with his sin and his bestial side he becomes a hero; in his misgovernance, he is the



devouring, sinning wolf, and in his exile, he is certainly a wretched companion of wild beasts, subject to the very worst of fallen nature. In the next chapter, we will look closely at the figure of Nebuchadnezzar and the wolfish Mermidonians, in a focused examination of figures of beastly exile in the Anglo-Saxon period.

## CHAPTER 4

### A CLOSE READING OF TWO ANGLO-SAXON POEMS OF BESTLY EXILE, *DANIEL AND ANDREAS*

Twenti 3er he heold þis lond; þa leoden al to hærmē.  
& seodðen him a time com; mid teonen he wes i-funden.  
þat he to wode wende. to wundre him-seoluan.  
to huntien after deoren; werfore he deð þolede.  
In þon wode he funde; feier ane hinde  
þa hunten wenden æfter; mid muchelen heora lude.  
Swa swiðe heo liððeden forð; þat þe king heom for-leas.  
þat nefde he næfer enne; of alle his monnen.  
He bi-com in a bæch; þer he bale funde.  
vppen ane weorede; of wlfan awedde.  
Heo him to lupen; on alchere halue.  
& to-luken þene king; & his leomen to-drowen.  
& his hors al-swa. þat deade heo weoren bo twa. <sup>158</sup>

If, therefore, birds are *metaphorical human beings* and dogs,  
*Metonymical human beings*, cattle may be thought of as *metonymical*  
*inhuman beings* and racehorses as *metaphorical inhuman beings*.<sup>159</sup>

As a closer exploration of the concept of bestial exile in Anglo-Saxon literature, this chapter explores the animal and natural imagery used to enhance the stories of two exceptional 'exiles,' King Nebuchadnezzar and the Memidonians, in *Daniel* and *Andreas*, respectively. I include these close readings to augment what might otherwise remain a slightly superficial survey of the Anglo-Saxon evidence for the literature of beastly exile. While neither King Nebuchadnezzar nor the

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<sup>158</sup> Layamon, *Brut*, ed. G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie, from British Museum Ms. Cotton Caligula A.IX and British Museum Ms. Cotton Otho C.XIII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 67.

<sup>159</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), 204.

Mermidonians are outlaws in the more narrow sense of the word, they certainly are exiles from God's law and from 'normal' communities of men, and thus the ways in which they are portrayed as animalistic is useful for this survey of exile literature.

### *King Nebuchadnezzar, the beastly exile*

King Nebuchadnezzar's exile, animal transformation, and conversion in Old English poem *Daniel* has provoked many intriguing interpretations over the past fifty years.<sup>160</sup> Critics suggest that Nebuchadnezzar goes through stages of denial, anger and acceptance, actively following a path of suffering to reach salvation. But a hovering uncertainty about whether or not the Babylonian king is transformed into a

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<sup>160</sup>In the homilies of Ælfric, one of the few other OE sources that discusses Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar is usually figured as a demonic figure who tries people's faith. On the three youth passages, see, Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, The First Series: Text*, ed. Peter Clemoes (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 2003), I, 37; and Ælfric, "Homily for Friday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent," in Bruno Assmann, *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, repr. with intro. by Peter Clemoes (Darmstadt: G.H. Wigand Kassel, 1889), B1.5.4; on Nebuchadnezzar as a figure of the Devil and Babylon as a type of Hell, see Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, The Second Series: Text*, ed. Malcolm Godden (London: Early English Text Society, 1979), II, 2.5. Catholic Homily II, 33 contains a literal translation of Daniel's prophecy in the Latin, but with no mention of claws or feathers: "ƿu nabochodonosor. ƿin rice gewit fram ðe. and ƿu byst fram mannum aworpen. and ðin wunung bið mid wildeorum. and ƿu etst gærs swa swa oxa seofon gear. oð ƿæt ðu wite ƿæt se healica god gewylt manna ricu. and ƿæt he forgifð rice ðam ðe he wile" [you, Nebuchadnezzar, your kingdom will go from you, and you will dwell with wild beasts, and you will eat grass just as an ox for seven years. Until you understand that the God above controls men's kingdoms. And that he gives kingdoms to whomever he wants.] Here again, the king is not transformed, but this is a translation of Daniel's prophecy, not the actual account of the time in the wilderness, when the king is actually transformed in the biblical account. Note also Ælfric's diction, which makes it seem as if this is a penance undergone by a man who still has the capacity to understand it. Robert Farrell does not touch on the passage in his two articles on the structure and unity of the poem or in his edition. See R.T. Farrell's "The Structure of Old English *Daniel*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen: Bulletin of the Modern Language Society* 69 (1968): 533-559, and his "The Unity of Old English *Daniel*," *The Review of English Studies New Series* 18, no. 70 (1967): 117-135.

beast or is merely a human forced by God into the wilderness as a punishment for his *superbia* is apparent in much of the scholarship on the poem. It seems that there exists little scholarly consensus over what exactly *is* happening in the exile passage, beyond the general agreement that the *Daniel*-poet focuses on Nebuchadnezzar's being brought low on account of his previous pride or lack of true understanding. Most critics argue that the poet deliberately deemphasizes the Vulgate's animal description by eliminating the passage where the king grows eagle's claws for nails and feathers for skin. Others, however, continue to read Nebuchadnezzar's exile as a literal transformation into a beast. His very identity poses an interpretive problem.

The complexity, I argue, is the result of three further levels of difficulty in the medieval reception of the biblical story of Nebuchadnezzar. First, the biblical account in the Vulgate is elliptical in describing the nature of Nebuchadnezzar's transformation and exile; second, Jerome's *Commentarii in Daniele*, the most influential patristic authority on interpretations of Nebuchadnezzar's animal metamorphosis, is ambiguous about whether or not the king really was transformed into a beast; finally, the *Daniel*-poet uses this indeterminacy to make his own radical reinterpretation of the sense and symbolism of Nebuchadnezzar's metamorphosis. Ultimately, the poet articulates a unique, triadic pattern of transformation: from predator to herbivore to human.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> I cite Daniel 4:17-12 here for reference: Daniel says, "Efficient te ab hominibus, et cum bestiis ferisque erit habitatio tua, et foenum ut bos comedes, et rore caeli infunderis: septem quoque

The poet avoids mentioning the avian aspects of Nebuchadnezzar's transformation as seen in the Old Testament account and instead emphasizes the moral importance of Nebuchadnezzar's two states of bestial behavior. Although he does not depict an avian metamorphosis, the poet does not omit animalistic imagery – in fact, he emphasizes his reading of the Babylonian king as a wolfish ruler and then as a frantic creature of the field. The poet chooses to elide the specific and striking biblical images which suggest Nebuchadnezzar's physical transformation in order to create a graceful tripartite structure of conversion; Nebuchadnezzar goes through a three-part 'metamorphosis.' Interestingly, there are exactly three passages in the poem where the poet refers to Nebuchadnezzar as a wolf and three where he is compared to a 'deor' – Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as a wolfish king (literally, wolfhearted) three times in the first part of the poem ("þa onwoc wulfheort" on line 116, and as "wulfheort cyning" in lines 135 and 246), and

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tempora mutabuntur super te, donec scias quod dominetur Excelsus super regnum hominum" and "et ab hominibus [Deus] eiicient te, et cum bestiis et feris erit habitatio tua: foenum quasi bos comedes, et septem tempora mutabuntur super te, donec scias quod dominetur Excelsus in regno hominum, et cuicumque voluerit, det illud." Then: "Eadem hora sermo completus est super Nabuchodonosor, et ex hominibus abiectus est, et foenum ut bos comedit, et rore caeli corpus eius infectum est: donec capilli eius in similitudinem aquilarum crescerent, et ungues eius quasi avium." Then Nebuchadnezzar says, "Igitur post finem dierum ego Nabuchodonosor oculos meos ad caelum levavi, et sensus meus redditus est mihi: et Altissimo benedixi, et viventem in sempiternum laudavi, et glorificavi: quia potestas eius potestas sempiterna, et regnum eius in generationem et generationem. Et omnes habitatores terrae apud eum in nihilum reputati sunt: iuxta voluntatem enim suam facit tam in virtutibus caeli quam in habitatoribus terrae: et non est qui resistat manui eius, et dicat ei: Quare fecisti? In ipso tempore sensus meus reversus est ad me, et ad honorem regni mei, decoremque perveni: et figura mea reversa est ad me: et optimates mei, et magistratus mei requisierunt me, et in regno meo restitutus sum: et magnificentia amplior addita est mihi." Michael Hetzenaver, ed., *Biblia Sacra Vulgatae Editionis* (Oeniponte: Wagner, 1906), Daniel 4:1 7-12.

he is either compared to or equated with wild herbivores in three separate sections of the second third of the poem (wild beasts are mentioned more than three times in these three sections, but three specific examples of this imagistic patterning are: “ne gewittes wast butan wildeora þeaw” on line 571, “wilddeora gewita” on line 623a, and “Siððan deora gesið, wildra wærgenga, of waðe cwom” on lines 661b-662.) Only after Nebuchadnezzar’s return to civilization is he characterized in positive human terms, as a “frod, foremihtig folca ræswa.”<sup>162</sup> This process of transformation is significant because it seem to follow a logical path through different states of being. Nebuchadnezzar is first savage and wolfish, then humiliated as a deer-like creature in the wilderness, and then finally humanized after he has done sufficient penance as an herbivore among the wild creatures. This tripartite pattern allows us to resolve an interesting interpretive problem in concerned *Daniel* criticism: why the Old English poet would not translate *Daniel* 4:33’s fabulous metamorphosis—it is part of the Old Testament, after all, and is a striking passage.<sup>163</sup> It is not as if the *Daniel*-poet avoided violent and dramatic imagery; the descriptions of battles, of the three youths in the fire, and Nebuchadnezzar’s violent nature are all elaborated upon in this poem.

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<sup>162</sup> *Daniel*, 666.

<sup>163</sup> “The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ [feathers], and his nails like birds’ [claws].” Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, eds., *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, Oxford’s World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), *Daniel* 4:33.

One of the most important texts influencing *Daniel*, both for the textual background of *Daniel* itself and in the history of later interpretations of the poem, is Jerome's commentary, which served as a primary source for medieval scholars and churchmen who wanted to interpret the animal metamorphosis.<sup>164</sup> I will cite this important passage here, since it has influenced scholars' interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's exile in the Old English *Daniel*:

Quis enim amentes homines non cernat instar brutorum animantium  
in agris vivere locisque sylvestribus? Et ut cuncta praeteream, cum  
multo incredibilia, et Graecae et Romanae historiae accidis-  
se hominibus prodiderint; Scyllam quoquam et Chimeram, Hydram,  
atque Centauros, aves et feras, flores et arbores, stellas et lapides  
factos ex nominibus narrent fabulae: quid mirum est si ad  
ostendendam potentiam Dei, et humiliandam regum superbiam, hoc  
Dei iudicio sit patratum?<sup>165</sup>

Scholars read Jerome's comments in different ways; some interpret his statement as an assertion that Nebuchadnezzar did change into a beast on a literal level because the Bible must be read literally, but others have seen this as a license to read this

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<sup>164</sup> In Jerome's *Danielem* I, iii, 19a-c; in Jerome, *S. Hieronimi presbyteri opera pars 1*, 5: *Commentariorum in Daniele Libri III (IV)*, edited by F. Glorie, CCSL 75A (Turnholt: Typographi Brepols, 1964), 802. According to David Wells in his immensely helpful article, *Wild Man from the Epic of Gilgamesh*, "Jerome's commentary on Daniel is definitive for the early Middle Ages; it exerted a major influence on the subsequent exegetical history of the episode" (398).

<sup>165</sup> F. Glorie, *Commentarii in Daniele Libre*. "For once men have lost their reason, who would not perceive them to lead their existence like brutish animals in the open fields and forest regions? And to pass over all other considerations, since Greek and Roman history offer episodes far more incredible, such as Scylla and the Chimaera, the Hydra and the Centaurs, and the birds and wild beasts and flowers and trees, the stars and the stones into which men are related to have been transformed, what is so remarkable about the execution of such a divine judgment as this for the manifestation of God's power and the humbling of the pride of kings." Jerome, *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*, translated by Gleason Archer (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), 47.

passage allegorically – that Nebuchadnezzar has lost his reason and is thus just like a beast.<sup>166</sup> But a close reading of Jerome’s diction shows that he was maintaining a certain ambiguity concerning the question of a literal transformation that would remain a hallmark of the tradition throughout the Middle Ages. The quotation above, with its comparison of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation to classical metamorphoses of people into rock, stones, stars, and fauna, seems to argue that anything is possible for the Judeo-Christian God, and that He can easily trump the feats of those demonic gods of classical antiquity. Nebuchadnezzar’s complete transformation, according to this logic, is thus possible, although Jerome wants us to understand that this episode does not need to be read literally.

Jerome prefaces his interpretation of the episode with a terse “*historia quidem manifesta est et non magna interpretatione indiget*” – the narrative is clear indeed and requires but little comment.<sup>167</sup> Jerome seems to think the moral of the story is self-explanatory; to him, it is crystal clear, “*quod ad offensam dei nabuchodonosor uersus in amentiam, septem annis inter bruta animantia uixerit et herbarum radicibus alitus sit, ac postea, dei misericordia restitutus in regno, laudauerit et glorificauerit regem caeli: quia omnia opera eius uera et uiae eius iudicia, et*

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<sup>166</sup> For this viewpoint, see Earl Anderson, “Style and Theme in the Old English Daniel,” *English Studies* 68, no. 1 (1987): 15.

<sup>167</sup> I:4: 244; Archer, Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel, 46.



gradientes in superbia potest humiliare.”<sup>168</sup> Interesting here, however, are some vocabulary choices that further illustrate Jerome’s own ambiguity in interpretation of the passage, as he seems to evade the issue. The king is ‘turned into a madman’ (versus est animentiam) which echoes the language of metamorphosis.

Nebuchadnezzar eats roots of herbs (herbarum radicibus alitus sit), not the grass which is mentioned in the Vulgate. This may be an attempt to downplay the miracle of the transformation, as it would be much easier to subsist on herbs and roots than on a diet of solely grass. This comment rebuts the skepticism of those who assert: “nequaquam potuisse fieri ut feno per septem annos uesceretur homo qui nutritus est in deliciis, et septem annis absque ulla laceratione corporis sui inter bestias uixerit, et quomodo amenti homini per septem annos imperium reseruatum sit regnum que potentissimum absque rege tanto tempore fuerit.”<sup>169</sup> But Jerome has had to change *feno* into the more general *herbarum radicibus* in order to rationalize the marvel.

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<sup>168</sup> I:4:244-246 “Because he displeased God, Nebuchadnezzar was *turned into* a madman and dwelt for seven years upon the *roots of herbs*. Afterwards by the mercy of God he was restored to his throne, and praised and glorified the King of heaven, on the ground that all His works are truth and His ways are justice and He is able to abase those who walk in pride. (Archer, *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel*, 46, italics mine).

<sup>169</sup> I:4:248-249 “These authorities assert that it was absolutely impossible for a man who was reared in luxury to subsist on hay for seven years and to dwell among wild beasts for seven years without being mangled by them. Also they ask how the imperial authority could have been kept waiting for a mere madman, and how mighty a kingdom could have gone without a king for so long a period.” (Jerome makes no concessions to these valid arguments) (Archer, *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel*, 46-47).

Jerome goes on, after having argued that Nebuchadnezzar *could have been* transformed into a beast, to say that he was only made mad, but his body was not transformed. To those who argue that no one would have dared to put such a powerful king in fetters, and that this proves that the story cannot be historical, Jerome responds coolly that that is what one does with a dangerous madman, king or otherwise: “quaerunt ergo a nobis qui historiae contradicunt: quomodo in uinculo ferreo et aere fuerit nabuchodonosor aut quis eum uinxerit et compedibus alligarit, cum perspicuum sit omnes furiosos, ne se praecipitent et alios ferro inuadant, catenis ligari.”<sup>170</sup> This comment further reinforces his second position, that Nebuchadnezzar is a madman, not an animal. He makes this rationalization even more explicitly when he interprets the moment of the king’s return from madness as he raised his eyes to heaven: “nisi oculos leuasset ad caelum, sensum pristinum non reciperet. quando autem dicit sibi sensum redditum, ostendit non formam se amisisse sed mentem.”<sup>171</sup>

Here we can see that, even though he initially asserts that it is indeed possible for men to turn into beasts, Jerome strongly implies that the king of Babylon’s

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<sup>170</sup> I:4:278-280 “And so those who object to the historicity of the narrative ask how Nebuchadnezzar would have been bound with chains of iron and brass, or who would have bound him or tied him up with fetters. Yet it is very clear that all maniacs are bound with chains to keep them from destroying themselves or attacking others with weapons” (Archer, *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel*, 50-51.)

<sup>171</sup> 1:4:301-303. “Had he not raised his eyes toward heaven, he would not have regained his former intelligence. Moreover, when he says that his intelligence returned to him, he shows that he had not lost his outward appearance but only his mind” (Archer, *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel*, 53).

change was just a psychological one. In spite of all this rationalization, however, Jerome's justification for the possibility of actual metamorphosis has introduced a certain interpretive ambiguity in the tradition of exegesis which will be passed down in the subsequent literature about the exile. Gregory the Great compounds this ambiguity, as he argues that Nebuchadnezzar had, in fact, become a beast lacking human reason.<sup>172</sup> A careful reader of the biblical text and the tradition of patristic commentary and homiletic explanations of Nebuchadnezzar's exile like the *Daniel*-poet would be affected by these accounts and interpretations of the exile, and perhaps be confused about how to represent the mad king in his own version of the story. Jerome's assertion that the 'narrative is clear indeed and requires but little interpretation' can thus be shown – with regard to this detail, at least – to be a fairly optimistic assessment of the situation.

Let us return to the Old English *Daniel* by reiterating Anderson's question: why would the author of *Daniel* pass up such a good opportunity to describe the transformation in more "exotic or even lurid" detail, especially after the patristic authorities seem to differ among themselves on the issue?<sup>173</sup> After all, later English writers such as the *Pearl*-poet would use the *Book of Daniel* as an excuse to create a vivid and horrific scene of monstrosity and metamorphosis.<sup>174</sup> And grotesque

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<sup>172</sup> PL75 col. 688B.

<sup>173</sup> Anderson, "Style and Theme in the Old English Daniel," 14.

<sup>174</sup> See *Cleanness*, lines 1671-1702. Also see Anderson, "Style and Theme in the Old English Daniel 14-15, 23; and Penelope Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children* (see chap. 1, n. 6).

descriptions of monstrosity were a matter of great interest to an Anglo-Saxon audience. Scenes of animal/human metamorphosis or hybridity can be found throughout the Old English corpus. Some examples are the hanged bird-like man of *The Fates of Men*, the wolfish exile in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the dog-headed saint in the life of Saint Christopher, the cannibalistic pagan wolf-like Mermedonians in *Andreas*, and of course, Grendel and his mother, to name just a few. So why does this poet avoid the matter, apparently deliberately? Several solutions suggest themselves. First, the poet could be following one interpretation of Jerome, which reads this transformation as an inner, spiritual and psychological one, not an actual metamorphosis. Second, following alternate interpretations of Jerome and Gregory the Great, the *Daniel*-poet could be depicting a literal metamorphosis into animal form while omitting descriptive details like the eagle's claws and feathers.

Assuming the author is following Jerome's lead in interpreting this passage as a metaphorical metamorphosis, as has been suggested by Farrell and others, then how can this be supported with textual evidence?<sup>175</sup> The Bible itself is ambiguous in that the transformed Nebuchadnezzar is described as a being who eats grass, but eagles are, after all, meat-eaters. The omission of these details in the poem may be an example of the *Daniel*-poet's conscious correction or improvement of the biblical narrative in an attempt to make sense of a problematic moment. Farrell notes that

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<sup>175</sup> R.T. Farrell, "The Unity of Old English *Daniel*," 130; see also R. E. Bjork, "Oppressed Hebrews and the Song of Azarias in the Old English *Daniel*," *SP* 77 (1980): 213-226.

this is not an unusual practice for this poet. He eliminates the content of the first dream, changes whole historical sequences, and elides the apocalyptic material in the end of the *Book of Daniel*, arguably for the sake of thematic cohesion. Moreover, the *Daniel*-poet adds details not found in the Vulgate such as the Jews' turning to *deofuldædum* (devilish deeds) and the exact location of Balthazar's feast, not 'indicated in the Bible account.'<sup>176</sup> These changes show that the poet was not overly careful to make a close translation of the text, preferring elaboration and/or logical cohesion to strict adherence to his exemplar.

Another possible solution to this question is that eagles were viewed as a symbol of nobility in the animal kingdom: according to the medieval hierarchical laws of nature, the eagle is the king of the birds just as the lion is king of the beasts. If the poet is correcting what he sees as an inappropriate punishing transformation for a king who exhibited *superbia* throughout his reign, then why then would he portray Nebuchadnezzar as one of the proudest of animals? Such a transformation does not seem like an educative punishment; would it not make more sense for him to become a more docile beast, such as an herbivore? So the poet, following the logic of his poem to its conclusion, eliminates all possible ambiguity in his portrayal of the King's transformation by eliminating the confusing aquiline details and thus

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<sup>176</sup> R.T. Farrell, *Daniel and Azarias* (London: Harper Row, 1974), 30-31. See also Anderson's description of the poet's cutting out other passages, "Style and Theme in the Old English Daniel," 15.

reducing any interpretive confusion: here, the proud king is unequivocally brought low.<sup>177</sup>

Still, there *does* seem to be a metamorphosis of sorts in the Old English *Daniel* even though the poet omits Nebuchadnezzar's claws and feathers. Since Jerome's comments can be interpreted in different ways, it is possible that the Old English poet was following what he perceived as Jerome's lead by making the metamorphosis more internally logical. This is consonant with the poet's tendency to simplify and to avoid complicated allegorical passages, as he does by eliminating the whole apocalyptic second half of the *Book of Daniel* and the contents of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream.

Nebuchadnezzar's ambiguous transformation into a beast associates him with several strains of Anglo-Saxon beast lore concerning wolves and beasts of the field. The *Daniel*-poet seems to keep the language about the details of Nebuchadnezzar's form ambiguous, or at least he does not depict him as a hybrid creature or a monster, in order to emphasize what seems to be an important set of images. If anything, he offers a consistent symbolic interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar as two specific categories of animal prior to his conversion. The

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<sup>177</sup> But see Wells, *Wild Man from the Epic of Gilgamesh*, 412-415, where he points to a very active tradition in the medieval period of justifying Nebuchadnezzar's transformation into an eagle (or lion) as an appropriate one for the king. Eusabius of Caesarea is reported as saying that the eagle as the swiftest bird and the lion as the strongest beast match Nebuchadnezzar as the most powerful king (412). These people are missing the point, however, and the *Daniel*-poet seems to be a very careful reader and interpreter of the biblical text, and thus not likely to err in such a way.

conversion of the wolfhearted king who is rapacious and cruel, and who threatens his subjects and captives with cruel death to a ruminant beast of the field, is a very powerful poetic justice. His final restitution and conversion returns him to the state of humanity, a state with which, arguably, he was never previously familiar.

In order to intensify the symbolic power of Nebuchadnezzar's conversion, the *Daniel*-poet seems to want us to see Nebuchadnezzar as subhuman throughout his poem, even before he enters his wilderness. He places a great deal of emphasis on Nebuchadnezzar's bestial nature and his lack of understanding of God's role as the supreme ruler. The unconverted Nebuchadnezzar's bad governance and general bloodthirstiness identify him as a wolfish king. The wolfish king is arguably a specific type in Anglo-Saxon literature, a figure who shows up repeatedly in various contexts, for example, in the poem *Deor*, where the Gothic king Eormenric plagues his kingdom with his savagery, his "wylfenne geþoht," or wolfish thought. The *Deor*-poet implies that this wolfishness in the king's nature made the whole nation unhappy:

We geascodan      Eormanrices  
wylfenne geþoht;      ahte wide folc  
Gotena rices.      Þæt wæs grim cyning.  
Sæt secg monig      sorgum gebunden,  
wean on wenan,      wyscte geneahhe  
þæt þæs cynerices ofercumen wære.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> "We have heard of the wolfish thought of Eormenrice; / he had the rule of the Gothic kingdoms' people. That was a cruel king. Many a man sat bound by sorrows, in expectation of

Another example of this motif is found in *Beowulf*'s Heremod, a legendary king who behaved violently towards his subjects, was overcome by anger and pride, and consequently suffered exile on account of his crimes ("he ana hwearf, / mære þeoden, mondreamum from.")<sup>179</sup> Like the bad churchman (a bad shepherd, a wolf in sheep's clothing) who neglects or even preys upon his own flock, the wolfish king does the same, preying on his subjects and leading his nation into decline. The pre-exilic Nebuchadnezzar falls into this infamous category of rulers. His bad governance, greed, and lack of concern for his subjects, as well as his brutal treatment of subjugated peoples, characterizes him as a wolfish king, and this judgment is made explicit, as I have already noted, several times in the narrative.<sup>180</sup> In Anglo-Saxon England, the wolf was not viewed as an unequivocally noble animal, although it was admired for its prowess in matters of violence.<sup>181</sup> Thus it would not violate the logic of the punishment for the king to become a wolfish exile. But he is emphatically not a meat-eater in his exile—he lives on grass, so he cannot be read as a wolfish figure in the exile section of this poem. Instead, it makes more

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woe, wished that that kingdom were overthrown" (lines 21-27). All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

<sup>179</sup> "Ne wearð Heremod swa / eaforum Ecgwelan, Arscýldingum; / ne geweoƿ he him to willan, ac to wælfæalle / ond to deaðcwalum Deniga leodum; / breat bolgenmod beodgeneatas, / eaxlgesteallan, oþþæt he ana hwearf, / mære þeoden, mondreamum from." 1709b-1716.

<sup>180</sup> "He turned away from the joys of men, alone, that famous prince." See lines 116, 209-216, 128-135, 247.

<sup>181</sup> For examples of this ambiguity of the wolf in Old English, c.f. the life of St. Edmund, descriptions of outlawry in the Old English laws, the various beast of battle topoi, and the 'wulf' element in names. Also see Aleksander G. Pluskowski's *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages*.



sense to read the *pre*-exile Nebuchadnezzar as a wolfish figure, for the king is referred to repeatedly as 'wulfheort'.<sup>182</sup>

In the first moment at which the king is described as 'wolfhearted', we see Nebuchadnezzar at his worst, awakening from a drunken dream, and significantly, the adjective used to describe his state is 'wulfheort':

þa onwoc wulfheort,      se ær wingal swæf,  
Babilone weard.<sup>183</sup>

Describing Nebuchadnezzar as 'wolfhearted' connects his wolfish, bestial state with his general immoderation, his greedy, sinful habits. The second 'wulfheort' moment occurs when the king calls together his advisors and threatens them with death should they not describe and interpret his dream:

þa him unbliðe      andswaredon  
deofolwitgan      (næs him dom gearu  
to asecganne      swefen cyninge):  
"Hu magon we swa dygle,      drihten, ahicgan  
on sefan þinne,      hu ðe swefnede,  
oððe wyrda gesceaft      wisdom bude,  
gif þu his ærest ne meaht      or areccan?"  
þa him unbliðe      andswarode

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<sup>182</sup> Caie, 6, notes this foreshadowing in a footnote: "The fact that Nebuchadnezzar is frequently called *wulfheort* in *Daniel* (116, 135, and 247) indicates his degeneration from the loftiest position in the human hierarchy to a subhuman one, just as Satan fell from angel to devil. We are also prepared for his physical degeneration and lycanthropy, when he wanders in exile like a beast. In addition, the wolf, being the archetypal enemy of the lamb, suggests demonic connotations, as Satan In *Christ I*, for example, is called *se awyrgða wulf* (256). Farrell unfortunately translates *wulfheort* by 'fierce, brave', but in all the occurrences in *Daniel* it would appear that the evil, non-heroic aspect of the wolf is intended."

<sup>183</sup> "Then the wolfhearted one, he who previously had slept in drunkenness, the Babylonian guardian, awoke."

wulfheort cyning,      witgum sinum.<sup>184</sup>

When he addresses his 'deofolwitgan,' his assembly of magicians, he is again described as a 'wulfheort cyning,' and this phrase emphasizes his brutality as well as his spiritual greed. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon functions as a demonic mirror for functioning civilization, for in Anglo-Saxon law, a witan is a civilized assembly of law-keepers and -makers, not a demonic assembly of sorcerers, and the *Daniel*-poet seems to emphasize that contrast here.<sup>185</sup>

In the 'Three Youths' section of the poem, Nebuchadnezzar's cruelty reaches the extreme of attempting to roast the three Hebrew youths in a gigantic oven. The king is described as being *bolgenmod* during this episode, which reinforces a possible interpretation of the king as a sort of rage-filled bestial berserker figure even before he loses his senses in exile.<sup>186</sup> In this ultimate act of thoughtless cruelty, he is described as wolfhearted: "(wolde wulfheort cyning      wall onsteallan, iserne ymb æfæste)."<sup>187</sup> This exceptional cruelty is characterized with unambiguous language: "Hreohmod wæs se hæðena þeoden,/het hie hraðe

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<sup>184</sup> 128-135: "Then the demonic members of the witan answered him unhappily (the judgment/glory was not given them to say the king's dream):/ How may we know such hidden things about your dream—how you dreamt, or the shaping of fates knowledge—if you cannot tell us its first beginning?" Then the angry, wolfhearted king answered his advisors."

<sup>185</sup> On Nebuchadnezzar as a figure of the Devil and Babylon as a type of Hell, see Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series, Text*, II, 2.5.

<sup>186</sup> See line 209.

<sup>187</sup> "The wolfhearted king wanted to install a wall, iron around the law-fast ones." Citations of the Old English text are taken from Farrell's edition.

bærnan.”<sup>188</sup> Throughout this first section, Nebuchadnezzar is repeatedly portrayed as a greedy, cunning, bloodthirsty leader; as for example, when he plans to enslave the Israelites:

Awehte þone wælnið      wera alдорfrea,  
 Babilones brego,      on his burhstede,  
 Nabochodonossor,      þurh niðhete,  
 þæt he secan ongan      sefan gehygdum  
 hu he Israelum      eaðost meahte  
 þurh gromra gang      guman oðþringan.  
 Gesamnode þa      suðan and norðan  
 wælhreow werod,      and west foran  
 herige hæðencyninga      to þære hean byrig.<sup>189</sup>

His armies are as savage as he is, and are characterized, as he is, as slaughter-hungry, powerful, savage, and heathen. They function as an extension of his person, an inhuman growth of a rotten state.

A wolf as the devilish and monstrous enemy of men is a common figure in both the Old and New Testaments, but here in *Daniel*, the biblical motif is compounded with native anxieties about wolves, presumably enhanced by their own beast-lore and their notions of good and bad kingship, of a bad king as a mirror of a good one. The direct comparisons of the Babylonian king to wolves are simply one aspect of a pervasive pattern of Germanic imagery in which Nebuchadnezzar is

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<sup>188</sup> 241: “Savage/wild in mood was the heathen prince; he commanded that they be burned immediately.”

<sup>189</sup> Lines 46-54: “Nebuchadnezzar, the leader of men, Babylon’s ruler, in his city-dwelling kindled slaughterous hatred though intense hostility, began to search his mind’s thoughts for how he most easily might push out those men from Israel though a grim troop. He brought together from south and north a savage troop, and they went west, that army of heathen kings, to that high city.”

characterized as crazed, cruel, and bestial. The Old English poet draws upon the imagery of the wolfish exile when he emphasizes Nebuchadnezzar's state of 'outlawry' from God's law, as in this important passage:

þa wæs breme      Babilone weard,  
mære and modig      ofer middangeard,  
egesful ylða bearnum.      No he æ fremede,  
ac in oferhygde      æghwæs lifde.<sup>190</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar does not keep a covenant with God – he doesn't follow His law. Although he is a famous and glorious king, he lives in 'overthinking' or 'pride' and is thus not fit to be described in human terms. The lack of respect for God's law seems to be extremely important to the Daniel-poet. He mentions it in the first third of Nebuchadnezzar's life, but also returns to the notion of a legal act of covenant with God or beasts, respectively, in the passages about the Israelite slaves and Nebuchadnezzar post-revelation, when he returns to civilization a complete man, and in the exile passages, in which the Babylonian king shares a covenant of sorts with beasts of the field. When viewed in conjunction with Nebuchadnezzar's wickedness and savagery, his denial of law emphasizes his subhuman qualities. In a significant parallel to Nebuchadnezzar's state of perdition and lawlessness, the Israelites themselves are also at least spiritual exiles at the time of their enslavement, at least according to the logic of this poet:

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<sup>190</sup> 104-107: "Then the guardian of Babylon was well-known/ famous and proud, all through the earth, / awesome/terrifying to the sons of men. He did not keep the law, / but rather always lived in 'overthought.'"

Siendon we towrecene      geond widne grund,  
 heapum tohworfene,      hyldelease;  
 is user lif      geond landa fela  
 fracod̥ and gefræge      folca manegum,  
 þa usic bewræcon      to þæs wyrrestan  
 eorðcyninga      æhta gewealde,  
 on hæft heorugrimra,      and we nu hæðenra  
 þeowned þoliað.<sup>191</sup>

Their lack of good standing with God has reduced the Israelites to the ignoble status of beasts of burden enslaved to a wolfish king, but their state can only be temporary, for they made an agreement with God long ago. Yet for the time being, they are 'fah wið God', as Anderson emphasizes in this passage:

The Hebrews forsook their covenant and: 'in gedwolan hweorfan' (lines 22b) and 'curon deofles cræft' (line 32b), and for this reason God allowed the Babylonian *imperium* to prevail against them. So long as the Hebrews kept the covenant, they possessed an *imperium*, 'þæt hie oft fela folca feore gesceodon'81 (*Dan.* 15), but when they broke the covenant, Nabochodonossor, God's instrument of punishment, carried them off as slaves, 'to weorcþeowum' (line 74b).<sup>192</sup>

Azarias, speaking as a representative of this rejected tribe in the face of Nebuchadnezzar's implacable persecutuin, reminds God of the great covenant with his people, further emphasizing the importance of the notion of covenant in this poem with specifically legal and moralistic diction:

Ne forlet þu usic ane,      ece drihten,

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<sup>191</sup> 300-308: "We are exiled across the wide earth, separated into tribes/groups, helpless. Our life is well-known and disdained by many people in many lands; thus they have exiled us into the possession of the worst of earthly kings into the power of the slaughter-grim men, and we now suffer enslavement to heathens."

<sup>192</sup> Anderson, "Style and Theme in the Old English Daniel," 20-21.

for ðam miltsum      ðe ðec men hligað,  
 and for ðam *treowum*      þe þu, tirum fæst,  
 niða nergend,      *genumen hæfdest*  
 to Abrahame      and to Isaace  
 and to Iacobe,      gasta scyppend.  
 þu him þæt *gehete*      þurh *hleoðorcwyde*,  
 þæt þu hyra frumcyn      in fyrndagum  
 ican wolde,      þætte æfter him  
 on cneorissum      cenned wurde,  
 and seo mænigeo      mære wære,  
 had to hebbanne      swa heofonsteorran  
 bebugað bradne hwyrft....<sup>193</sup>

The words Azarias chooses emphasize the inviolability of God's covenant with his chosen people. When he demands that God 'ne forlet' – not abandon (or forsake) – the Israelites, he seems to be indirectly reminding his god of the shame that comes from breaking a contract. He continues to emphasize this powerful – and uncomfortable – point throughout this prayer, reminding God of the promise or covenant (*treowum*) which God has undertaken (*genumen hæfdest*), and has declared publicly (*gehete þurh hleoðorcwyde*). These are all legal terms that remind God of his moral obligation to uphold his side of the bargain. That the *Daniel*-poet would choose to emphasize the notion of covenant so sharply in this section reinforces the theory that covenant is an important idea throughout the Old English poem.

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<sup>193</sup> 309-325, italics mine: "Do not abandon us alone, Eternal Lord, on account of the mercies which men ascribe to you, and the promises/ covenants that you, victory-firm savior of men, have taken up with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. O creator of souls, you promised them verbally through the sound of your voice, that you would increase their offspring in the coming times, that after them generations would be born and that the multitude would be well-known, to increase their kind as the heavenly stars fill the broad turning expanse of the heavens....."

The emphasis on Nebuchadnezzar's wolfishness sets him up for a beautifully parallel fall, and so, in the second phase of his life, the *Daniel*-poet emphasizes the king's similarity to a deer.<sup>194</sup> He becomes a grass-eater, the very prey of the wolfish creature to which he was previously compared. To quote the texts in which Nebuchadnezzar is depicted as a beast of the field, first, we have Daniel's interpretation of the dream, which is a prophecy of the king's exile:

Se ðec aceorfeð        of cyningdome,  
 And ðec wineleasne        on wræc sendeð,  
 and þonne onhweorfeð        heortan þine,  
 þæt þu ne gemyndgast        æfter mandream,  
 ne gewittes wast        butan wildeora þeaw,  
 ac þu lifgende        lange þrage  
 heorta hlypum        geond holt wunast.  
 Ne bið þec mælmete        nympe mores græs,  
 ne rest witod,        ac þec regna scur  
 weceð and wreceð        swa wildu deor,  
 oðþæt þu ymb seofon winter        soð gelyfest,  
 þæt sie an metod        eallum mannum,  
 reccend and rice,        se on roderum is.<sup>195</sup>

This echoes the language of the Israelites' wretched exile. In this passage,

Nebuchadnezzar follows four distinctly bestial 'customs.' First, not only can he not

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<sup>194</sup> Although the AS word 'deor' can refer to any wild beast, several specific clues identify Nebuchadnezzar specifically as an herbivore, and one particularly intriguing passage narrows the field of simile to the hart, and though I use the word deer thus in a non-technical sense which echoes the AS general meaning, I am certainly leaning towards a deerish Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>195</sup> Lines 568-580: "[God] will cut you out of your kingdom/ and will send you into joyless exile/ and then he will turn your heart/ so that you no longer remember the joys of man/ nor have any intelligence but the customs of wild beasts. / But rather, you, will live for a long time / around the forest, leaping like a hart. / Nor will there be for you any appointed time for food except for the grass of the moor, / nor certain rest from suffering. Rather, the showers of rain/ will stir you up and pursue you just like a wild beast, / until in the course of seven winters, you believe the truth/ that there is one creator of all mankind / a measurer and a ruler, who lives in the heavens."

remember the happy ways of humans, but rather he has no wits at all. Thus, like a beast of the field, he lacks self-reflection and self-knowledge. Second, he lives in among the harts in some way; the syntax of this passage is difficult and awkward to translate into smooth modern English, and it seems at least possible that a phrase or a few lines are missing in the manuscript. From what we have, we can at least see that in one way or another the poet compares Nebuchadnezzar's situation with that of deer in the forest. The phrase as it stands in the Old English is literally translated as 'with the leaps of harts,' but there are other possible options for translation. It could be translated, as Bradley does, as following "the tracks of the deer," or it could equally read that Nebuchadnezzar is leaping like a deer.<sup>196</sup> There could also be an ungrammatical pun imbedded in this ambiguous syntax – perhaps the poetry is also meant to suggest that Nebuchadnezzar's heart – a homophone with hart – is forever leaping in a continuous state of fear. Third and fourth, he can no longer depend upon the luxuries and temporal order of human life – Nebuchadnezzar has no specific dining time but eats all the time, in a continuous state of grazing. He has no shelter, but must rather brave the elements out-of-doors, from season to season. Nor does he have an 'appointed' time for resting; like a beast, he sleeps when he can, with 'open ye.' We can see from this passage that Nebuchadnezzar really does share all the essential customs and habits of wild herbivores; his habits of moving,

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<sup>196</sup> See Bradley, "The First Riddle of the Exeter Book," *Academy* 33 (1888): 197-198.



sleeping and eating, and most importantly, his very thoughts, are all emphatically bestial, not human. Later on in the poem, after Nebuchadnezzar has been restored, the poet tells us that everything happened just as Daniel prophesied.<sup>197</sup> This makes it seem that the poet intends us to read Daniel's prophecy as an actual description of what did happen to Nebuchadnezzar – that he became fundamentally bestial. But the poet retains the ambiguity of his state; Nebuchadnezzar eats grass, has a fitful sleeping schedule, forgets his humanity, and lives in the wood leaping with the leaps of harts, but this need not mean he is physically transformed into an animal. If there is not a textual omission, then the poet seems careful to keep this question ambiguous, even on the level of syntax – what is important for his reading of this story is Nebuchadnezzar's state of mind and his actions.

The second passage of importance for this argument is the account of the exile itself:

ðā for ðam gylpe	gumena drihten
forfangen wearð	and on fleam gewat,
ana on oferhyd	ofer ealle men.
Swa wod wera	on gewindagum
geocrostne sið	in godes wite,
ðara þe eft lifigende	leode begete,
Nabochodonossor,	siððan him nið godes,
hreð of heofonum,	hete gesceode.
Seofon winter samod	susl þrowode,
wildeora westen,	winburge cyning.
ðā se earfoðmæcg	up locode,
wilddeora gewita,	þurh wolcna gang.

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<sup>197</sup> See lines 654-656.

Gemunde þa on mode      þæt metod wære,  
 heofona heahcýning,      hæleða bearnum  
 ana ece gast.      þa he eft onhwearf  
 wodan gewittes,      þær þe he ær wide bær  
 herewosan hige,      heortan getenge.  
 þa his *gast ahwearf*      in godes gemynd,  
 mod to mannum,      siððan he metod onget.  
 Gewat þa earmsceapen      eft siðian,  
 nacod nydgenga,      nið geðafian,  
 wundorlic wræcca      and wæda leas,  
 mætra on modgeðanc,      to mancynne,  
 ðonne gumena weard      in gylpe wæs.<sup>198</sup>

The third, more brief, account of the transformation of the king occurs in the poet's summary of Nebuchadnezzar's proselytizing after his restitution, in which we get one more brief description of his life in the wilderness with wild beasts as companions:

Wyrð wæs geworden....  
 Swa ær Daniel cwæð  
 þæt se folctoga      findan sceolde  
 earfoðsiðas      for his ofermedlan.  
 Swa he ofstlice      godspellode  
 metodes mihtum      for mancynne,  
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<sup>198</sup> Lines 612-636: "On account of that boast, the leader of men/ was taken and departed in flight/ alone in arrogance above all men. / So went the man, on those days of struggle/ on the most mournful journey in God's torment, / that any other living person that has lived. / Afterwards, the hostility of God, / fast from the heavens, that hate fell down upon Nebuchadnezzar. / For seven winters together he suffered punishment / in the wilderness of the wild beasts, that king of the wine-city. / Then the miserable man looked up, / the knower of wild beasts, through the moving clouds. / He remembered in his heart that the Measurer was / Heaven's high king of the princes of men / and the one eternal Spirit. Then his spirit returned, changed from / the wits of a madman which he had earlier borne far and wide / a wild, warriorlike thought, near to his heart. / Then his soul returned, mind to the man in the remembrance of God, / after he comprehended the Maker. / [Then] travelled that miserable wretch afterwards on a journey / naked, propelled by need, acknowledging his hostility, / wonderfully wretched without clothing, / more humble in his thoughts towards mankind/ than that lord of men had been in his boasting."

Siððan deora gesið,	
wildra wærgenga,	of waðe cwom,
Nabochodonossor	of niðwracum,
siððan weardode	wide rice <sup>199</sup>

From these three passages, we can see that Nebuchadnezzar's exile is described three separate times in the poem. It is significant that most of the scholars who view this as only a psychological transformation avoid citing the first portion of the narrative. In spite of the poet's omission of claws and feathers, Daniel's interpretation of the king's prophetic dream is fairly explicit in its figuration of the king as a beast, not just an exiled wanderer. First, he eats an exclusive diet of grass, and this is *not* a typical image of exile in the Old English period. Exiles still eat human food. Nebuchadnezzar eats grass, and moreover, he does not desire anything else to sustain him, as any other human in the wilderness would; after all, it is impossible for the human body to survive on a diet of grass.<sup>200</sup> Similarly, the protagonists of the other exile poems find shelter from the elements, and when they cannot, they are conscious of their suffering – in fact, the genre is defined by this

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<sup>199</sup> 655-665: "Fate happened ...just as earlier Daniel had prophesied, / that the leader of men should find / miserable journeys for his pride./ Thus he often spread the news/ of God's might over mankind ....Since the journey-companion of wild animals, had come from that journey of beasts, his wild companions/ Nebuchadnezzar had come out of hostile torments / He ruled over his great kingdom."

<sup>200</sup> With the exception of certain medieval penitential practices which are themselves probably not physically possible, such as exclusive sustenance on the communion wafer for years straight. It has been posited that Nebuchadnezzar's diet of grass is a penitential motif, and thus akin to the hairy anchorite tradition (see Wells, *Wild Man from the Epic of Gilgamesh*, 403) but this is probably a later development in the genre. As Wells makes clear, penitence is a public act, and requires cognition of the act to work. Nebuchadnezzar, whose only witnesses are beasts, meets none of these requirements.

interior consciousness of physical discomfort on account of exposure to the elements. King Nebuchadnezzar is clearly unconscious of this suffering, and he endures it passively, as we can observe from the very syntax of the passage: Daniel tells the king: “þec regna scur / weceð and wreceð swa wildu deor” [the showers of rain/ will stir you up and pursue you just like a wild beast], and later on we hear that Nebuchadnezzar suffers God’s hostility in the waste: “nið godes, / hreð of heofonum, hete gesceode. / Seofon wintra samod susl þrowode, / wildeora westen, winburge cyning.” In both passages, rain and hostility fall down on him from heaven, and he suffers torments, but he acts like a beast, running from here to there in an effort to escape this incomprehensible torture. Thus his exile cannot be placed in the same generic category as the Anglo-Saxon elegiac poetry. Nor, although it is tempting to read the passage in such a way, can it be seen as an internalized psychological portrait of psychological change. Things happen to him, and he cannot understand why, and cannot thus develop psychologically. Gillian Overing’s attractive argument that this exile is structured in order to depict him as “a man who must undergo and *understand* change through the hardships of existence” therefore needs some qualification, since it conflicts with the king’s lack of intelligence throughout his ordeal.<sup>201</sup> Nebuchadnezzar’s experience of change cannot be construed as one which furthers understanding, at least not until he has become

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<sup>201</sup> Lees and Overing, *A Place to Believe in*, 11.

conscious of that change, at the end. It is not a *passio*, for this requires understanding of the torments one is undergoing.

Farrell notes that the poem is studded with “a series of weighted words which appear throughout the poem, always in similar contexts,” making the conflict and themes of the poem more explicit. These terms generally refer to knowledge and law.<sup>202</sup> We have already explored the importance of legal terminology in the first part of the poem: the Israelites, exiled by a vengeful God, remind him of his covenant with their forefathers, and Nebuchadnezzar himself is described as ignoring the law altogether. Legalistic and covenant-related terminology appear again in this section of the poem, and play an equally important role in the ultimate meaning of Nebuchadnezzar’s exile. I would first like to examine the word ‘*peaw*,’ which generally means ‘custom.’ Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that God will:

ðec wineleasne      on wræc sendeð,  
and þonne onhweorfeð      heortan þine,  
þæt þu ne gemyndgast      æfter mandream,  
ne gewittes wast      butan wildeora *peaw*,  
ac þu lifgende      lange þrage  
heorta hlypum      geond holt wunast.<sup>203</sup>

What does it mean to share the ‘customs’ of the wild beasts? On one level, it means behaving as beasts do: adopting their habits, eating their food, etc. But ‘custom’ can

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<sup>202</sup> Farrell, notes to *Daniel and Azarias*, 543.

<sup>203</sup> “He will send you into joyless exile/ and then your heart will be turned/ so that you no longer think about the joys of men / nor shall you have any thought except the ‘customs’ of wild beasts, / and you shall live a long time/[omission?] by the bounds of deer, around the wood” (638-643).

carry other connotations, something like ‘culture’ or even ‘existence.’<sup>204</sup> In Bosworth & Toller’s dictionary, the word is shown to describe ‘general practice of a community’ or to describe “a method of belief or practice of religion, as in reference to heathen ‘þeaw’”<sup>205</sup> The word ‘þeaw’ is not a specifically legalistic term, but it does have powerful religious significance, since it refers to all the little habits that define a specific ethnic group. It seems the poet intends the word ‘þeaw’ to mean something a bit more than just ‘food’ and ‘habits.’ His portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar frantically running about the woods suggests a complete transformation, an absorption into the way of being of herbivores, since men cannot move like deer, no matter how athletic or mad they may be. Significantly, when Nebuchadnezzar is restored to his kingdom, the poet dryly notes that now he “Hafde beteran þeaw” – he is no longer behaving like an animal, but like a human, and he can once more enjoy the customs and manners of men. Taking the meaning of ‘þeaw’ one step further, Nebuchadnezzar no longer shares the belief-system of animals (which is probably nonexistent – if anything, they possess a purely material self-understanding) but rather, can again enter into the belief system of men, and in particular, he can believe in the Judeo-Christian God.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> See James Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1042. A simple search of the Old English Corpus will turn up more than 770 instances of þeaw, most of which refer to customs, habits or ways of being.

<sup>206</sup> But see, of course, the song of creation in the ‘Three Youths’ passage, where all of creation worships and praises the Lord.

The second word I would like to examine, 'wærgenga,' is closely related to the first in meaning and import for the poem as a whole. In the wilderness, Nebuchadnezzar lives with animals — they are his 'wildra wærgenga', his wild companions. But the word 'wærgenga' is composed of two lexical elements, the first meaning 'covenant' and the second, 'goer.' Nebuchadnezzar's 'wild companions' could also be read as his 'wild covenant sharers.' The implications of this are significant, since the notion of covenant is so important for the *Daniel*-poet and, arguably, for the whole of the Junius manuscript.<sup>207</sup> If Nebuchadnezzar shares a covenant with wild beasts, he can no longer be part of the covenant between God and man. Thus he is not technically human, but animal, *no matter what outer form he assumes*. Overing notes that "Nebuchadnezzar's punishment is curiously appropriate since he has throughout the poem responded only through his senses, his punishment is to be totally confined to a bestial level of response. Living as a wild animal he is stripped of the human potential for reason and imagination," and the capacity for spiritual apprehension of divinity.<sup>208</sup> In other words, Nebuchadnezzar is an animal because he has broken the basic covenant between God and man.

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<sup>207</sup> For example, the three youths, whose character is set in direct opposition to Nebuchadnezzar's, are described variously as soðfæst (151), wærfæst (194), and æfaste (89). The word wærfæst is also used to describe Abraham's covenant with God on line 194. See also Anderson, 12: "Knowledge of law, 'æ', and loyalty to covenant, 'wær', are important values in the poem," as in Cynewulf's *Elene*. See also Anderson, "Style and Theme in the Old English *Daniel*," 18, 19.

<sup>208</sup> Lees and Overing, *A Place to Believe in*, 10.

That the *Daniel*-poet had the notion of covenant, not just companionship, in mind is further supported by other instances of covenant-breaking in the poem, which always lead to deprivation of power. In a logical extension of the notion of *translatio imperii* set forth by Anderson, I would argue that Nebuchadnezzar should also be seen as having broken the covenant with God and thus as being deprived of his empire. Consequently, he must now enter into a new covenant – with the animals, since he has broken his covenant with both God and man.

Interestingly, Nebuchadnezzar's reversion to the innocent state of the beasts is reminiscent of Adam and Eve's prelapsarian state. That the poet may have had this analogue in mind is suggested by his addition of the imagery of the king's return as a 'nacod nydgenga' aware of God's hostility. The Bible does not say that Nebuchadnezzar returned to his kingdom naked, but the poet adds this detail to further parallel Adam and Eve's pitiful expulsion from the Garden of Eden after they have suddenly become aware of their shameful nudity.<sup>209</sup> Similarly,

Nebuchadnezzar's nakedness is a focal point:

Gewat þa earmsceapen      eft siðian,  
 nacod nydgenga,      nið geðafian,  
 wundorlic wræcca      and wæda leas,  
 mætra on modgeðanc,      to mancynne,  
 ðonne gumena weard      in gylpe wæs.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Although God has clothed them with animal skins by this point, they have experienced the shame of nakedness.

<sup>210</sup> 631-635.



The poet mentions Nebuchadnezzar's nakedness twice specifically and once in a possible pun – when he is described as *earmsceapen*, this can be understood colloquially to mean wretched, but literally, it means miserably-shaped. This could be a reference either to the tradition of seeing Nebuchadnezzar as a metamorphosed exile or to the awkwardness of the naked human form. The repetition of words which suggest nakedness reinforces the shameful vulnerability of the once-powerful king's state, but more importantly, it lets us know that Nebuchadnezzar is now human in essence, because he has become conscious of his nudity.

The moment at which Nebuchadnezzar changes from a beast-like exile to a fully realized human being is very important, and accordingly, the *Daniel*-poet emphasizes the revelatory nature of Nebuchadnezzar's change. The man-as beast comes full circle, and he regains his human understanding. Only after years of penance, of gazing at the ground as herbivores and other beasts do (but men do not), can the kingly exile literally look up, which is an action of non-bestial awareness, whereupon his heart is lifted from its base state. Only then can he be restored to a fully human state:

Ne lengde þa      leoda aldor  
witegena wordcwyde,      ac he wide bead  
metodes mihte      þær he meld ahte,  
siðfæt sægde      sinum leodum,  
wide waðe      þe he mid wilddeorum ateah,  
oðþæt him frean godes      in gast becwom  
rædfæst sefa,      ða he to roderum beseah.  
Wyrð wæs geworden,      wundor gecyðed,  
swefn geseðed,      susl awunnen,  
dom gedemed,      swa ær Daniel cwæð,  
þæt se folctoga      findan sceolde

earfoðsiðas      for his ofermedlan.<sup>211</sup>

When Nebuchadnezzar looked up to the sky and suddenly recognized the power of God, his wits ‘returned’ [ahwearf] when he looked up; at this moment his heart was changed.<sup>212</sup> Again, Jerome’s commentary seems to have influenced this passage, for as Jerome says, “had he not raised his eyes toward heaven, he would not have regained his former intelligence. Moreover, when he says that his intelligence returned to him, he shows that he had not lost his outward appearance but only his mind.”<sup>213</sup> The idea that humans have spirits and advanced self-consciousness partly because they can look to heaven is a standard Platonic motif, found in exegetical tradition in authors like Alfred the Great, in Dante, in *Piers Plowman*, and elsewhere in medieval literature, and it is implicit in the *Daniel*-poet’s narrative as well.<sup>214</sup> But other things beyond the lifting or turning of the heart are invoked in this passage as well, for the poet takes pains to emphasize that Nebuchadnezzar looks up to heaven and comprehends things for the first time in seven years, which suggests that he has

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<sup>211</sup> 645-656.

<sup>212</sup> This could also be read as “his soul turned to thought of God,” and it is translated as such in Bosworth and Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 32. But I would argue that this other reading, which is also grammatically feasible, makes more sense when viewed in light of the tradition of seeing animals as lacking intelligence. The language of the OE poem seems to echo the liturgical Latin for the moment of conversion: ‘sursum corda’ – lift up your hearts, appears in the preface to the Anaphora’s opening dialogue, and is generally understood to refer to a moment of conversion or revelation. More specifically, to lift up one’s eyes means the same thing and corresponds more closely to the language of the poem.

<sup>213</sup> See Archer’s translation, previously referenced at the beginning of this chapter, 1:4:301-303.

<sup>214</sup> See Alfred the Great on the horizontal nature of animals in *Man and the Beasts* (*De Animalibus*, Books 22-26), trans. James J. Scanlan (Binghamton: Binghamton University Press, 1987), 69. In the *Piers Plowman B-text*, Passus 11, line 104, Will looks up and is finally able to participate in the life of the spirit.

generally maintained a downward-looking, perhaps even hand-and-knees posture during his exile. This deepens the reading of the exiled king as a beast of the field, since he appears to have adopted their customs quite completely, indeed. If his wits were absent during his seven-year sojourn in the wild, he can no longer be categorized as human. The Anglo-Saxons, like many peoples, considered intelligence to be a faculty which separates humans from animals. The contrast between animals and humans is made explicit in some of the Anglo-Saxon homilies. For example, in *Vercelli Homily II*, the tortured souls would rather “Pæt hie næfre ne wæren / accened fram hiora fædrum & modrum, oððe ælc hiora to dumbum nytenum gewurde”<sup>215</sup> Here we see that for humans, who have the gift of understanding, it would be better to be born without intelligence (i.e. be a beast) than to suffer the torments of Hell. This homilist demonstrates that, during the Anglo-Saxon period, beasts could be seen as thoughtless, and their lack of intelligence, although it consigns them to oblivion, also preserves them from eternal torment, which a direct result of misused human intelligence. If Nebuchadnezzar’s wit returns to him at the end of his madness, then it means he did not have it while he was a beast, and it thus logically follows that he was essentially bestial for the duration of his exile. Another homily elucidates the distinction between humans and animals further as it describes the hierarchy of beings in the world: “we syndon nyðor þon[n]e Godes

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<sup>215</sup> “It would be better that they were never born from father and mother, or that each of them were turned to dumb beasts” (translation mine). From *Vercelli II*: 52-55, cited from D.G. Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, Vol. 300 (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1992).

englas & gewisran þonne nytenu. Lytel is betwyh mannum & nytenum butan andgite.”<sup>216</sup> This homilist insists that physical characteristics do not separate man from beast – understanding is the only thing that makes us human. The currency of this idea strengthens the argument that Nebuchadnezzar transformed into an animal in the Old English *Daniel*, whether or not he grew feathers and claws, for he lost his intelligence completely in his exile.

As we have seen, the indeterminacy implicit in the poem’s account of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation derives in part from the biblical account, which could be clearer about the nature of Nebuchadnezzar’s exile; second from Jerome’s commentary, which maintains a certain ambiguity in its interpretation of whether or not the king literally transformed into a beast, and finally by the *Daniel*-poet himself, who seems to accept this indeterminacy and take pains to preserve it, using intentionally vague diction and syntax to keep audiences guessing about the meaning of the transformation. But if one looks carefully enough, a pattern emerges. The importance of this triad of bestial and human states must be emphasized. The *Daniel*-poet is profoundly concerned with states of being – with exploring what is an animalistic state and what is a human one, and exploring that fine line between the two states. The poem in this way becomes about maintaining the state of balance necessary to avoid falling away from one’s precious humanity into a state of bestial

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<sup>216</sup> “We are below God’s angels and wiser than beasts. Little separates man from beasts except understanding” Vercelli homily IV: 75-77 (translation mine).

perdition – one can fall either way, becoming too wolfishly full of self, too rapacious and greedy, or becoming a thoughtless bovine, forgetful of everything that matters. The *Daniel*-poet suppresses the biblical elements of hybrid monstrosity because he wants his audience to understand the deeper meaning of the transformation – it is interior, not exterior, or at least the exterior details, whatever they may be, are not important. Depicting a lurid bird-monster would be too sensational, and may seem too exciting to the audience, thus distracting them from the moral meaning of the poem – they seem to love monster lore, after all. Instead, he omits the thrilling details in order to make his Anglo-Saxon audience focus their hearts and minds on what he sees as the real import of the poem – that one can be an animal in nature without any physical transformation at all. Moreover, in focusing his animal similes on wolves and herbivores specifically, the *Daniel*-poet also makes it possible for a body of Anglo-Saxon beast lore to influence the meaning of the poem. The wolfish outlaw and the related figure of the wolfish king, both fairly widespread figures in extant Germanic texts, can come into play, both commenting on the irony of Nebuchadnezzar's state of absolute power without law, and foreshadowing his subsequent exile. Further, the rapacious predator figured in the early lines of the poem feeds upon the energy of other humans, who in turn, are reduced to beasts of burden in their servitude. Thus, the *Daniel*-poet intensifies the poetic justice of Nebuchadnezzar's exile by turning him into the very kind of senseless bestial creature which he previously created through his active enslavement of other people.

### *The Wolfish Mermidonians*

In its concern with states of being, *Daniel* shares implicit thematic concerns with another religious poem, *Andreas*. Both ask: what makes one human, and what kinds of behavior push one out of a state of humanity into a state of either wolfishness or mindless animality? The *Andreas*-poet takes considerable pains to characterize the anthropophagous Mermidonians – who herd humans like cattle, fattening them for consumption – as wolfish exiles from God, and he methodically equates their captives with beasts of the field.<sup>217</sup> On line 149, the cannibals are described explicitly as wolves, thus finally verbalizing the analogy which has lain behind the *Andreas*-poet's description of the Mermidonians from the very beginning of the poem:

swa hit wælwulfas	awriten hæfdon
þæt hie banhringas	abrecan þohton,
lungre tolysan	lic ond sawle,
ond þonne todælan	duguðe ond geogoðe,
werum to wiste	ond to wilþege,
fæges flæschoman.	Feorh ne bemurndan,
grædige guðrincas,	hu þæs gastes sið
æfter swyltcwale	geseted wurde. <sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> See Shannon Godlove's article "Bodies as Borders: Cannibalism and conversion in the Old English *Andreas*," *Studies in Philology* 106, no. 2 (2009): 137-160.

<sup>218</sup> 149-156: "Thus the slaughter-wolves had written that they intended to break the joints rapidly – break body from soul – then deal out to young and old warriors, to men as good and sustaining food, the doomed one's flesh. They did not mourn his life, those greedy warriors, nor did they consider how the soul's journey might be prepared for."

The description of their cannibalism echoes the activities of that other great bestial cannibal Grendel, and, as others have argued, it directly echoes the language of *Beowulf*. The Mermidonians fixate on the mechanics of devouring, thinking only of the technical aspects of consumption of human bodies – the breaking of joints, the tearing of doomed flesh. It is important that the poet emphasizes the fact that they have no concern for the fate of their victims’ souls – they lack the human *understanding* of the greater import of human death. Significantly, they too practice a beastlike custom:

Swelc wæs þeaw hira	
þæt hie æghwylcne	ellðeodigra
dydan him to mose	meteþearfendum,
para þe þæt ealand	utan sohte. <sup>219</sup>

Again, here the weighted word *þeaw* is used to describe a beastlike custom, a way of being that is emphatically inhuman, according to the Anglo-Saxon poet. In Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar never actually devours his captives, but he certainly does destroy them, and their slavery certainly does dehumanize them.

The better to eat their human prey, the Mermidonians use sorcery to transform the minds of their prisoners into bestial ones. Although their victims retain their human form, they have the understanding of beasts, and thus have no comprehension of their ghastly fate:

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<sup>219</sup> 19-28: “Such was their custom that they turned each foreigner that sought the island from afar into food for the meat-needy.”

se onwende gewit,      wera ingeþanc,  
 heortan on hreðre,      (hyge wæs oncyrrred),  
 þæt hie ne murndan      æfter mandreame,  
 hæleþ heorogrædige,      ac hie hig ond gærs  
 for meteleaste      meðe gedrehte.<sup>220</sup>

These bestial lost souls are battened like cattle on hay and grass, in a monstrous parody of the processes of animal husbandry so dear to Anglo-Saxon culture. Where their captors suffer from an excessive desire for flesh, their prey is equally dehumanized by a complete lack of desire for meat. Nebuchadnezzar, in his deerish state, is similarly dehumanized. Thus the monstrous tableau is completed – human wolves devouring human cattle, and both parties deprived of their most precious birthright, human understanding.

This material in *Andreas* is salient since it sets up the same powerful contrast between two categories of being which, though technically human in form, can no longer be categorized as human in understanding. They are locked in a cycle of predator and prey that makes it impossible for any of them to achieve the understanding that could free them from their bestial state. I conclude with this brief parallel examination of *Andreas* in order to push this paper's relevance a little further, asking questions that might point outward toward a theory of use of animal/human hybrid imagery in Anglo-Saxon poetic texts: how is intelligence

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<sup>220</sup> "It [the potion] destroyed their intelligence, the inner thoughts of men, the heart in their breast (their thought was turned) so that they didn't mourn after the joys of man, but rather, they ate hay and grass for food." This diction is parallel in many ways to that in *Daniel*.



defined, and how do humans descend into a state of unreason? Although technically, human beings are the only kinds of creatures that have souls, are there ways in which their souls can abandon them? What does it mean to share a covenant with God, and what moral responsibilities does this entail? How permeable are the boundaries between human beings and animals, and what are the absolute definitions for each category? We have found some here, I believe; looking up toward heaven, our very means of walking upon the earth, predisposes us toward salvation, unlike that of nearly all our animal coinhabitants of this earth. We have also discovered that the state of humanity is a very fragile one, easily lost through extreme behavior on either side of the ethical fence – either through excessive greed, gluttony, and sinful behavior, or perhaps more interestingly, through mindlessness, stupidity, and cowardice. Finally, this study would show that humans preying on other humans in various ways was a considerable concern, at least in the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus, enough so that several Old English poetic interpretations of the biblical or apocryphal passages significantly revise the action in order to explore the notion of humans turned bestial in various ways, and specifically, the notion of bestial humans preying on other bestial humans. The lore of exile and the lore of animalistic behavior come together in both of these poems in powerful studies of the thin line between humanity and monstrosity.

In spite of the ambivalence I have pointed out in these chapters which result from the motifs' beating against the ideological cage in which it has been imprisoned by anxious clerics, for the most part, nevertheless, the Anglo-Saxon material is fairly

controlled in its depictions of outsiders as beastlike, outlaws as bad monsters, even if we do detect a soupçon of sympathy. It is civilized, controlled, and has a clear religious message. So, as we shall see in the coming chapter, when we get to the Anglo-Norman period, we are struck by the unruliness of the outlaw material. Due to a lack of a scholarly class which narrowly controls messages, all sorts of dialectics are allowed to erupt, and the result is a messy, complex outlawed figure, who reflects many of the period's anxieties.

## CHAPTER 5

### HEREWARD: TRACING THE OUTLAW'S LIFE CYCLE

There is in Britain a fen of immense size.... There are immense marshes, now a black pool of water, now foul running streams, and also many islands, and reeds, and hillocks, and thickets, and with manifold windings wide and long it continues up to the north sea....They told [Guthlac] many things about the vastness of the wilderness. There was a man named Tatwine, who said he knew of an island especially obscure, which oft-times men had attempted to inhabit, but no man could do it on account of manifold horrors and fears, and the loneliness of the wide wilderness.<sup>221</sup>

In the period following the Norman Conquest of England, literature about bestial outlaws proliferated in England.<sup>222</sup> The reasons for this are numerous, but some primary factors are the marginalization of Anglo-Saxons and Norse communities on the one hand and the assertion of colonial power by the invaders on the other, ultimately leading to a new vision of the landscape within the perspective of this new balance of power. The changing use of the landscape—changing forest and wilderness land use laws, and plant and animal populations in drastic flux, among other things—had a major impact on this new literature. Similarly, the

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<sup>221</sup> From *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. C.W. Goodwin (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 51-57.

<sup>222</sup> In *Engaging with Nature*, Napran notes the “relatively sudden appearance of a cluster of exile literature... [which] concentrated on heroic outlaws, both real and legendary (such as Hereward the Wake, El Cid, Eustache the Monk, Fulk Fitz Waryn, and Robin Hood). They are mostly exiled mercenaries of one type or another who were sent away, not from cities, but from much larger and less defined territorial areas”(3). Note that Napran’s list includes only one figure outside the English tradition.

fecund cross-pollination of previously regional literary motifs, and other literary traditions influenced this tradition; they combined in England to create an entirely new kind of literature whose hero appears to have been this protean trickster figure who has no home and relies on his wits in an unfamiliar political and natural landscape in order to survive. Another reason was the loss of many alpha predators from the actual English landscape, leading to a certain freedom of literary interpretation of their habits and habitat previously unthinkable. A final factor was the reactionary response to a swiftly changing world; all this change led to a certain nostalgia for a simpler, possibly 'better,' past where unity with nature was still possible.

Also, there is a way in which perhaps the Anglo-Saxon culture found itself outlawed overnight, a trauma from which it certainly took some time to recover. Not only were Anglo-Saxon landholders despoiled of their lands swiftly and irrevocably, a story we know relatively well, but also the entire English army became outlawed by William and were treated as such as soon as Harold fell at Hastings. Because they were 'traitors to the king,' they were not allowed burial, and Harold Godwinson's body was deliberately buried on the seashore, in the liminal place of the criminal.<sup>223</sup> This, combined with William's prompt destruction of the neighboring towns, sent a clear signal: your law, your loyalties, even at times your existence, is now outlawed.

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<sup>223</sup> See Bates, *William the Conqueror*, 69-70 (see chap. 2, n. 38).

Thus those who dared publicly to lead rebellions – and there were many who did so in the years following the Conquest – were only ‘super’ outlaws since they chose to embrace and perform the status which had been so suddenly imposed on every English person.

Because of the many forces acting upon England at the time, and the submersion of literature in English beneath that written in French and Latin, the texts I will use to demonstrate the continuance and amplification of the bestial outlaw tradition in Post-Conquest England are primarily in Latin and Anglo-Norman French, although a few fairly marginal examples, such as Layamon’s *Brut*, are in English. My definition of such texts as examples of an English tradition rests upon the fact that they are, for the most part, written about English subjects by dwellers in England. They are indicative of a vast cultural meme that is percolating through a society of disparate linguistic, social, and economic units. From courtly fantasies of exile and return, to clerical histories of crime and power, to the faint traces of local peasant legend in chronicles and elsewhere, the bestial outlaw seems to have been on the minds and tongues of a cross-section of England’s inhabitants in the few hundred years following the Norman Conquest.

While the bestial outlaw was an important figure in Anglo-Saxon England, I have argued that that literature is fairly controlled in its depictions of outsiders as beastlike, and outlaws as bad monsters, even if we do detect a soupçon of sympathy. It is civilized, controlled, and has a clear religious message. So when we get to the Anglo-Norman period, we are struck by the unruliness of the outlaw material. Due

to a lack of a politically-ascendant religious 'academy' of sorts which narrowly controls messages, all sorts of dialectics are allowed to erupt in the tradition, and the result is a messy, complex outlawed figure, who reflects many of the period's anxieties.

And these tales weren't just shared by a diverse lower and middle class. The royal court, too, played a vital role in the dissemination of these new hybrid stories:

The literature of mirabilia is particularly well-represented in the Anglo-Norman realm. The court of the Plantagenets, much more than that of the Capetians, cultivated a taste for oral traditions and folklore and supported the clerics who gathered them. For in that kingdom, in that time, the most diverse languages and traditions crossed paths — Angevin, Norman, English, Welsh, and even Irish — objects of curiosity and of comparison.<sup>224</sup>

Marie de France's exploration of the pain of exile and betrayal through the figure of the werewolf in *Bisclavret*, Gerald of Wales' description of the outlawed wolf couple in *Topographia Hibernica*, the varied accounts of the Wild Hunt, the story of Arthur and the werewolf Gorlagon, the explosion of fables and romances about the wolf Ysengrim and the fox Renard, the change in descriptive language in the chronicles when the chroniclers begin to describe figures of exile as bestial, explorations of bestial exile in the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the romances of the exiled heroes in King Horn and Havelock and the legends of Hereward and Fouke le Fitz Waryn all provide evidence of the popularity of stories and lore about the bestial outlaw in

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<sup>224</sup> From Jean-Claude Schmidt's *Ghosts in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 80.

this period, and of course, an in-depth analysis of all of them would require a life of work and more than one book.

I will sum up the import of this lore with the succinct description in Alain de Lilles' *De Planctu Naturae*; in the opening description of Nature's amazing gown, where all sorts of lore-invested animals are depicted, we get a typical image of the outlaw as wolf, or wolf as outlaw: "there the wolf, adopting the role of a highwayman, by lying in hiding, deserved to swing aloft on gallows row."<sup>225</sup> That the primary thing Alain de Lille thinks of when he comes to a depiction of the wolf as an animal is his equation with outlawry, and highwaymen in particular, is revealing indeed. Most of the animal lore in Nature's gown is quite standard, conventional imagery, so the wolf as outlaw can be safely assumed to be one of the primary folkloric equations being made about this predator in the 12th and 13th centuries. The tale of the outlaw is one of the primary stories being told and the animal lore is, so to speak, woven into it.

In the interest of space and time, therefore, these next two chapters will focus on two particularly representative outlaw narratives, both of which exemplify the multicultural, multilinguistic tenor of the post-conquest literature of the bestial outlaw. The legend of Hereward, as it stands extant in a Latin MS, in the *Liber Eliensis*, and in *Gaimar's Histoire des Engleis*, provides an opportunity for a fascinating

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<sup>225</sup> Alain de Lille, *The Plaint of Nature*, trans. James Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), Prosa 1, 101.

study of the many oral traditions helping to build an outlaw legend. The romance of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, the second primary text under analysis in this portion of the monograph, is an interesting hybrid text, a compilation of many oral outlaw legends told about a historical Anglo-Norman family. In its complexity it points to the ambiguities involved in telling tales of bestial outlaws. A reading of these two outlaw narratives in sequence will demonstrate the deep multiculturalism of bestial outlaw legends in the high Middle Ages in England. Both are wild, digressive, highly individual texts which sprawl every which way, in a sort of organic exuberance which delights in aesthetic appreciation of the landscape and inadvertently problematizes any political agenda.

### *Hereward*

In many ways, the story of Hereward best exemplifies the outlaw 'life cycle' as it appears in tales and songs in medieval England. Most of the elements I identified in the introductory chapter of this study are present in the works dealing with Hereward's life and actions, and thus we begin our study of the post-Conquest figure of the outlaw with a character who is, in nearly every respect, all outlaw. Throughout this chapter, we will trace Hereward's trajectory from monstrous teenager, to monster-killer, to savage avenger, to trickster wild man, to hunted and ultimately destroyed pest. In the process of this journey, we will also discover how much the stories of Hereward share motifs and language with Scandinavian outlaw narratives, concluding that the Anglo-Danish influence on the English Bestial outlaw



tradition has been seminal, and hitherto underestimated. We will also explore the authors' depictions of the specific landscape of fenland marsh and forest, discovering a very telling politically-oriented dichotomy of natural depiction.

### *Textualities and Oralities*

The *Gesta Herewardi* is the primary text under examination in this chapter. The redactor of the version that we have, which reads like an awkward 'pony' translation of a text in another language, is written in Latin and found in a single MS. The Romance, or perhaps Saga, of Hereward is found at the end of the legal documents of Robert of Swaffham, who appears to have been the cellarer and pittance of the Peterborough Abbey. MS Peterborough Cathedral MS 1, fols 320-39 is the only copy, and the translator and redactor had intended to revise the narrative, which seems to be (and admits to being) awkwardly translated from Old English. The author claims to glean Hereward's youth from a decaying collection of Anglo-Saxon stories about the exploits of giants and warriors. He says: "It was the endeavor [of Hereward's erstwhile chaplain Leofric] to assemble all the doings of giants and warriors he could find in ancient stories as well as true reports for the edification of his audience."<sup>226</sup> Hereward was but one of the many assembled heroes and giants in this collection in the lost MS, rotten with damp. Significantly,

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<sup>226</sup> Stephen Knight, Thomas Ohlgren and Thomas Kelly, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 14.

the warriors and giants are lumped together as a category which was perhaps antagonistic, but a category all the same, in the mind of this story's rescuer. It is sad to think of this missing anthology of other texts, arguably filled with other stories about other larger-than-life monster-killers.

The compiler also claims that songs and tales of Hereward are sung throughout the north of England, a tantalizing hint of what once was. Likewise in the *Liber Eliensis*, we learn that "songs of him were still sung in the taverns by the common people."<sup>227</sup> We know that Hereward was a historical figure who rebelled against what is depicted as exceptionally unpopular Norman rule in the region, but the story, as a legend, has been subject to the accretion of other hero and outlaw motifs. As Michael Swanton puts it, "The Greenwood ideal of the outlaw life seems to be already understood: good company and an abundance of food. In what seems a virtually prelapsarian refuge, a just society at one with Nature, despite all odds."<sup>228</sup> Hereward has two 'habitats' – the fenland marshes and the fenland forests, with both of which he merges with consummate skill and ease.

Although Hereward has been romanticized a classically English hero, the Danish influence on the north of England was powerful and prevalent, and, as Wright argued nearly a century ago, the influence of the Norse saga tradition is quite visible, both in the narrative style and in the episodes of the story. C. E. Wright

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<sup>227</sup> Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 28.

<sup>228</sup> Michael Swanton, "The Deeds of Hereward," in *Medieval Outlaws. Twelve Tales in Modern English Translation*, ed. T. H. Ohlgren, 2nd ed (West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2005), 20.

notes that the remarks in the first chapter of the *Gesta Herewardi* seem to show that the exploits of Hereward the Wake soon circulated as saga, “for in the north and east districts, the old fashions, strengthened by Scandinavian influences, doubtless lasted longest.”<sup>229</sup>

That this story is at least influenced by Scandinavian traditions is suggested by the names of the members of Hereward’s rebel army, the most prominent of whom were powerful Danish landowners. Consider, for example, Turkil of Harringworth, whom Cyril Hart has identified, through a perusal of contemporary records, as one of the most prominent landowners in the Eastern Danelaw at the time of the Conquest. Turkil was a Danish thane who deserted his vast estates “and went over to the Danes who were his kinsmen” according to the entry in the Red book of Thorney.<sup>230</sup> Another major sidekick of Hereward’s, who similarly seemed to have been a more prominent figure in the actual history of the period, was Siward Bearn, who maintained connections with the Scandinavian world. So Hereward’s band of rebels was solidly made of a population of extremely prominent Anglo-Danes who resented the loss of their property post-Conquest and were not favorably disposed toward the invading Normans.

As we learn at the end of various accounts of the rebellion, after the loss of their stronghold at Ely, the outlaws took flight for Scandinavia, where their friends

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<sup>229</sup> C.E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga*, (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1939), 31.

<sup>230</sup> Hart, *The Danelaw*, 636.

and relations could take them in and provide for them in the absence of their lands. It seems unlikely that such a bothersome group of rebels would become the stuff of Anglo-Norman romance; they seem like much likelier candidates for a more indigenous art form, be it saga or the famous cantillena (apparently an Anglo-Danish song form) said to have been performed detailing the deeds of this legendary band. Perhaps the narrative as it comes down to us contains aspects of both saga and folksong; some parts of the amalgam of texts and stories found in the *Gesta Herewardi* read like prose narrative, others like shorter poetic forms). This is further supported by the fact that the legends of Hereward were specifically local, and never seem to have flourished outside of the former Danelaw. The reason for this is that the material was likely relatively unattractive to a wider audience. Even though the Hereward legend is extant in Gaimar's *Histoire Des Angleis*, it seems to be a compilation of local legend, perhaps created in an attempt to make an uncomfortably anti-Norman legend more appealing to a broader and less resentful audience. It becomes, in Gaimar's hands, a sort of public therapy, acknowledging the hurts and violence of the Conquest yet offering at the end a vision of reconciliation and future cultural harmony. So both stories are visible amalgamations of local folk tradition, and possess a certain unruly vitality as a consequence.

The Danish historically occupied the area of Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire which forms the setting for the Hereward legend, yet the author seems determined to portray Hereward as a classically English hero. Still, as Wright

argued nearly a century ago, the influence of the Norse saga tradition is quite visible, both in the narrative style of the tale and in the episodes of the story. Maurice Keen sees the *Gesta Herewardi* story as sharply divided between the 'legendary' first half, "much closer to the stories of the saga heroes than to those of the heroes of Barnesdale or of Sherwood forest," while the second half displays all the characteristics of the prototypical outlaw narrative.<sup>231</sup> In fact, all the parts of this story contain aspects of the outlaw tradition; Hereward's early fights with bears and berserkers do not diverge from the notion of outlaw narrative, since these are both common motifs in the genre, especially when we include other northern medieval literatures in our survey. Such distinctions do not take the apolitical aspects of the outlaw tradition into account.

The Hereward material, I argue, belongs to a class of literature which is a direct result of the "literary activity of a mixed English-Scandinavian culture area," a vast shared heritage originally fostered by cosmopolitan kings like Æthelstan (with his tight trade connections with Harald Hárfagri) and Cnut.<sup>232</sup> We have evidence of saga and poetry transmission in this area. As *Egils Saga* so memorably bears witness, skalds performed their compositions for an appreciative but apparently sometimes

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<sup>231</sup> Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 11.

<sup>232</sup> Frankis, "Deor and Wulf and Eadwacer: Some Conjectures," 179.

naïve English audience. This legacy of more than 200 years of Scandinavian influence and activity is what we see here in the *Gesta*.<sup>233</sup>

The *Peterborough Chronicle* tells the story of Hereward from a different point of view; he comes off in that narrative as a more hybrid figure, divided in his sympathy between English and Danish interests. The chronicler of the year 1070 views Hereward “ond his genge” as a part and parcel with the other localized Danish threats which caused such problems for them in those years. The angry chronicler details the way that Hereward’s thugs attacked the Frenchman Turolde “who wæs swythe styrne man” and burnt and plundered the abbey. This passage places Hereward on the side of the ‘bad guys,’ and describes them using the time-honored descriptions of Viking plunder and savagery.<sup>234</sup> Likewise in his account, Hugh Candidus says that Hereward and his gang “*acciperent quicquid ibi erat in auro et argento et ceteris rebus.*”<sup>235</sup> Again, this links our hero with Danish, not English, interests since it shows him attacking and spoiling English churches without regard to a sense of propriety or mercy. So both of these sources on the life of Hereward see him as Danish in orientation and behavior if not in his nationality.

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<sup>233</sup> For a good overview of the links between the English and the Danish, see Mark Amodio and John D. Niles’ *Anglo-Scandinavian England* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002).

<sup>234</sup> *The Peterborough Chronicle: 1070-1154*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>235</sup> Hugh Candidus, *The chronicle of Hugh Candidus: a monk of Peterborough* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 77.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, C.E. Wright argued that a mass of ‘saga material,’ by which he presumably meant oral matter similar to the written sagas, was circulating in England. This material turns up in bits and pieces in many works in the post-Conquest period. Henry of Huntington, William of Malmesbury, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and other chroniclers and professional raconteurs all seem to use some oral Norse material, along with Celtic, continental, and other legend. Recently, Andy Orchard showed that there exist close textual parallels between the *Gesta Herewardi* and *Grettis Saga*; the author of the later saga either knew the legends of Hereward or the two epics share a common ancestry. In the deployment of the bear’s son motif, the fight with detractors, the outlawry of the hero, and more, the two stories share much common ground. Whatever the case, Orchard’s close textual study proved that the two are linked in a way that strongly suggests transmission of a ‘common heritage.’ Orchard was arguing for very textual Latinate tradition acting upon the later sagas, where I see this as an example of a thriving tradition of both oral and written Scandinavian material current fairly early on and in England.<sup>236</sup>

In spite of the occasional nod to the ‘possibility’ of Scandinavian influence (something I view as far more than possibility, since the work originated in the land of the former Danelaw) scholars still tend to argue for a more powerful French influence. The argument for a ‘mixed heritage’ – by which they mean Anglo-

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<sup>236</sup> Orchard’s work was presented at Cornell University in June 2008 in a talk for the Fiske Conference entitled “Declining Fortunes: the Vital Latin background to *Grettis Saga*.”

Norman and Anglo-Saxon – peppered with the slightest bit of Norse, is made for the *Gesta Herewardi* because of the ‘fantastic and romantic’ elements of the narrative. Aside from his more realistic adventuring, Hereward rescues princesses and battles dragons. The conclusion from this is that the story is deeply influenced by French romance, since it does not jibe with the general notion of Norse literature as ‘realism.’ But the fantastic element either erupts into or is quietly present in nearly all the sagas. The princess-rescuing and dragon-fighting which prominently figures in Hereward’s overseas adventures is a common enough motif in the *fornaldarsögur*, generally thought to be late bastard sons of both Norse and Continental material. But even the greatest sagas contain traces of ‘legendary’ material – for example, Egil’s trips abroad often result in fantastic episodes. Another pertinent example is *Færeyinga saga*, which contains motifs that could be identified as straight fairy tale, and it is thought to be one of the earliest written sagas.<sup>237</sup> And dragons have been adversaries of Germanic heroes long before the great period of saga production, to be sure. But if we want to follow the misleading guidelines of genre distinctions, we could say that the *fornaldarsögur* existed during the great period of saga production, but they are simply preserved within and as part of the sagas. Thus, I argue, the fantastic elements of the tale are not necessarily results of cross-pollination with romance.

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<sup>237</sup> See, for example, the fantastic episode of Ulfr and Sigmundr in the desolate cottage.



Many of the great Germanic culture heroes bridged the gap between English and Scandinavian culture. Egil fought for Athelstan; Beowulf, the great Swede, provided a template for heroism for an Anglo-Saxon audience as well as a link back to a Germanic past. Now we can add Hereward, the first great English resistance fighter, to the list of hybrid figures of a multinational England. It is especially fitting that a work which gains its character from sagas that are filled with colorful outlaws, should become the father of the equally vibrant English outlaw tradition. *The Gesta Herewardi* shows direct links with later outlaw narrative such as *Fulk Fitz Waryn*, *Eustache le Moine*, the *Tale of Gamelyn*, the late medieval ballads of Robin Hood, and others. Proving that Hereward has a distinctly Scandinavian flavor is important to a study of the later English outlaw narrative because it helps clarify certain motifs that otherwise remain obscure. Others have done this to a certain extent: Joost de Lange and Lord Raglan both suggested that parallels existed between Norse and English outlaw narrative, and most have noted that the Hereward story seems to demonstrate this to a certain degree, but few have challenged the dominant opinion that the *Gesta* is fundamentally a romance.

### *Of Monstrous Youth*

Hereward's juvenile propensity toward discord marks him early as a potential outlaw, according to the logic of this genre of literature. Hereward has a

coalbiter childhood, like those great bearish (and somewhat sociopathic) heroes, Egil Skallagrimsson and Grettir Ásmundarsson.<sup>238</sup> I will quote John Hayward's assessment of Hereward's youth: "The *Gesta* gives an interesting account of its hero's early life and it is interesting that the starting point is his expulsion from his father's house at the age of seventeen because of his untrustworthiness and sedition against his father:

Puer enim erat spectabilia forma et vultu decorus, valde decoratus ex flavente caesarie et proluxa facie, oculisque ragnis, dextro ab alio variante ante modicum glaucus; verum severus aspectu fuit, et ex nimia densitate membrorum admodum rotundus, sed nimis pro statura mediocri agilis, et in omnibus membris tota comperta efficacia. Inerat etiam illi a pueritia multa gratia et fortitudo corporis, et periectum virum hujus rei ex facultate statim in adolecentia forma virtutis ejus eum demonstrabat, et erat gratia fortitudinis et virtute animis in cunctis excellenter praeditus. Nam quantum ad liberalitatem attinet, ex paternis rebus et propriis dapsilis erat, et liberalissimus, solatium ferens omnibus indigentibus, scilicet crudelis in opere, et in ludo severus, libenter inter coaetaneos commovens bella, et inter majores etiam aetate in urbibus et in villis saepe suscitans certamina, nullum sibi in ausibus et fortitudinum exequutionibus parem nec majores etiam aetate relinquens. Hic ergo dum in talibus adhuc juvenculis et multis majoribus animositatum progressibus de die in diem proficeret, et juvenis supra modum in viriles actus transenderet, interdum nemini parcebat quem vel in fortitudine aliquantum rebellem suae virtuti cognoscebat seu in certamine. Propterea quidem et his etiam de causis saepissime seditionem faciebat in populo et tumultum in plebe. Unde patrem sibi inutilem et parentes valde ingratos reddebat, ob magnanimitatem ejus opera et fortitudinum cum amicis quotidie et vicinis decertantes, et inter provinciales velut hostes et tyranni se pro illo agentes, strictis

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<sup>238</sup> I cite Bernard Scudder's definition of the coalbiter: "the 'coal-biter' or 'male Cinderella' [is] a stock figure who seems unpromising, lazy, obstinate, and taciturn in youth, but flourishes into strength and prowess in manhood." From his introduction to his translation of *Grettis Saga*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), xiii.

gladiis et armis pene semper filium a ludo vel a certamine  
revertentem muniendo. Quod tandem pater ejus ferre non valens,  
ipaum a facie sua depulit. Nec sic quidem acquievit, sed assumptis  
secum collectaneis, patrem ad sua praedia tendentem interim  
praecedebat, distribuens bona illius amicis et sibi faventibus,  
constitutis in super sibimet in quibusdam paternis rebus ministris  
et servientibus.<sup>239</sup>

This is *not* a conventional or romanticized portrait. Hereward was considered to be reasonably good-looking but rather short, and although he possessed personal courage he was "cruel in act, and severe in play, readily stirring up quarrels among those of his own age, and often exciting contests among his elders."<sup>240</sup> We must concur with Hayward's assessment that this is not a romanticized portrait of a

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<sup>239</sup> From Miller, S.H., and W.D. Sweeting, eds. *De Gestis Herewardi Saxonis*, [Fenland Notes and Queries 25], 1895-7. "As a boy he was remarkable for his figure and handsome in his features, very fine with his long blond hair, open face and large gray eyes -- the right one slightly different from the left. However, he was formidable in appearance and rather stout because of the great sturdiness of his limbs; but despite his moderate stature he was very agile and there was great strength in all his limbs. From his childhood he exhibited such grace and vigor of body; and from practice when a youth the quality of his courage proved him a perfect man. He was excellently endowed in every way with the grace of courage and strength of spirit. And so far as generosity is concerned, he was particularly liberal with his own and his father's possessions, giving relief to all in need. Although tough in work and rough in play, readily provoking fights among those of his own age and often stirring up strife among his elders in town and village, he had no equal in acts of daring and bravery, not even among his elders. So when young, and as he grew older, he advanced in boldness day by day, and while still a youth excelled in manly deeds. In the meantime he spared nobody whom he thought to be in any way a rival in courage or in fighting. In consequence he often caused strife among the populace and commotion among the common people. As a result of this he made his parents hostile towards him; for because of his deeds of courage and boldness they found themselves quarreling with their friends and neighbors every day, and almost daily having to protect their son with drawn swords and weapons when he returned from sport or from fighting, from the local inhabitants who acted like enemies and tyrants because of him. Unable to stand this, eventually his father drove him out of his sight. He didn't keep quiet even then; but when his father went visiting his estates, Hereward and his gang often got there first, distributing his father's goods amongst his own friends and supporters." Translations are by Michael Swanton, "The Deeds of Hereward," 28-99.

<sup>240</sup> Geffrei Gaimar, *Lestoire des Engles*, ed. Thomas Duffus Hardy and Charles Trice Martin, The Rolls Series 91 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1888-1889), 2 t., 342.

young hero, but it is in fact conventional. It conforms strictly with one of the classic conventions of heroic saga literature: Hereward is a coalbiter, and his struggles with his father and cruelty at play are classic indications of his future as a hero of note. Similarly, the description of his appearance corresponds in tone to descriptions of saga heroes, who tend to be somewhat unusual-looking, and hardly ever of the classic warrior type.<sup>241</sup> This is especially true of heroes bound to become outlaws in their later careers. Hereward's inability to act in his family's best interest, to play nicely with other children, to follow rules, or to respect the peace has been read as a mark of ill breeding or cultural decadence, but we must remember that these are the very qualities that mark great outlaw heroes in the saga tradition as it comes down to us. Grettir, the greatest Norse outlaw, has strikingly similar problems with his own father. Like Grettir, Hereward has unsolvable problems with his family, and is pushed into an exile during which he must prove that his heroism outweighs his violent tendencies and that he is fit to reenter society. Whether he ever successfully achieves this goal is arguable.

In his exile from Lincolnshire, Hereward travels through the multicultural Norse-dominated world of the insular North Atlantic, a place of cultural contact with Celtic, English, Scandinavian cultures and a syncretic, shifting identity of settlement. Hereward travels to such places as Orkney, Cornwall, Ireland, Flanders,

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<sup>241</sup> Consider, i.e., Grettir's red hair and freckles, and Egil's topographical brow.

and the far North, performing various feats of strength to the amazement of his new acquaintances. Unfortunately, the chance encounters with and rescues of various damsels in distress during his years overseas do little to rehabilitate his humanity; rather, his fights with various bestial creatures serve only to reinforce his beastly nature.

Due to the Hereward story's conflation (Swanton calls it 'primordial iconotropy') of Norwegian stories of kingship, in particular the cycles surrounding the court of Hrolf Kraki, Hrothgar in Old English, there are close parallels between *Hrolf Saga Kraki*, Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, and *Hereward*. All three of these works are later conglomerations of legendary material linked with the story of *Beowulf*. HSK, *Beowulf* and Saxo all tell versions of migration-era stories of Norwegian kings, most of which are believed to be the product of a union between a woman and a bear. In what is likely some version of the Pan-European Bear's son tale type, Hereward defeats a rapist bear in single combat:

Cum quibus Herwardus in primordio sui adventus, videlicet in Natale Domini, associatus, rogavit sibi unum e feris aggredi licere, aut saltem illum maximum ursum qui aderat, quem incliti ursi Norweiae fuisse filium, ac formatum secundum pedes illius et caput fabulam clavorum affirmabant, sensum humanum habentem, et loquelam hominis intelligentem, ac doctum ad bellum ; cujus igitur pater in silvis fertur puellam rapuisse ; et ex ea Biernum regem Norweyae genuisse. Nec obtinere potuit : domino illius magnanimitatem juvenis percipiente, et pubertatem ejus pertimescente. Altera autem die bestia ruptis vinculis exobseratis claustris prorupit, omne dilanians et interficiens vivum quod consequi potuit. Mox autem, ut dominus rem comperit, milites praeparare se et illum cum lanceis aggredi jubet, nisi mortuum capi non posse adjugens. Interim Herwardus feram cruentatam ad thalamum domini sui propter voces trepidantium revertentem, ubi

uxor illius et filiae ac mulieres timide confugerant, obvium habuit, ac in illum confestim irruere voluit. Ipsum iste praevenit, gladium per caput et ad scapulas usque configens. Atque ibi spatam relinquens, bestiam in ulnis accepit, et ad insequentes tetendit. Quo viso plurimum mirati sunt.<sup>242</sup>

This story is very close to that told in *HSK*, where the kings of Norway are engendered by a humanoid bear.<sup>243</sup> Similarly, the anthropomorphized rapist bear which is terrorizing a community in the *Gesta* is purportedly “the offspring of a famous Norwegian bear which had the head and feet of a man and human intelligence, which understood the speech of men and was cunning in battle. Its father, so the stories and legends told, was said to have raped a girl in the woods and through her to have engendered Beorn, King of Norway” [n.b. the kingly line’s descent from an alpha predator and the subsequent ambiguity of tone about the

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<sup>242</sup> Cap III. “And Hereward, having associated with these young men, at the commencement of his visit, namely at Christmas, asked that he might be allowed to attack one of the wild beasts, or at least that very large bear which was there, which men said was the offspring of a famous Norwegian bear, and fashioned, as to his feet and head, in shapes of perfect monstrosity, having the sense of a man, and understanding the speech of man, and skilled in war : whose sire is reported to have ravished a girl in the woods and to have become by her father of Biernus<sup>4</sup>, King of Norway ; but Hereward could not get permission, the lord perceiving the bravery of the young man, but fearing for his youthfulness. But on he next day the beast burst asunder its chains and rushed forth from the bars of its cage, rending and slaying every living thing it could reach. But soon, when the lord heard of the circumstance, he ordered the soldiers to get ready and attack it with lances, adding that it could not possibly be taken alive. Meanwhile, Hereward came across the blood-stained beast as he was returning to the lord’s chamber, because of the shouts of the alarmed people, whither his wife and daughters and the women had in fright fled, and the beast immediately wanted to rush upon him. But Hereward anticipated it, driving his sword through its head down to the shoulder-blades, and leaving the blade there he took up the beast in his arms and held it out to those that followed. At which sight they were much amazed.”

<sup>243</sup> This was the focus of Orchard’s analysis of the *Gesta Herewardi* four years ago, and for a more thorough account of the parallels, I would direct you to his forthcoming work on the subject.

same beast].<sup>244</sup> This strange beast is a human/animal hybrid, possibly drawing upon the lore of the berserker tradition and probably related to the bear's son tradition. The bear has the limbs of a man, the body of a bear – interestingly he is the opposite of Bodvar Bjarki's family members in *HSK*, who have the bodies of people and the limbs of beasts – and we learn that the bear being let out of the cage is the son of the rapist bear who sired the the Norwegian kingship; this is a jumbled bearish heritage which seems bathetic in comparison to the stories it echoes. The young bear goes berserk, breaks its chains, and heads for the women's' quarters, only to be wrestled and destroyed by Hereward.

It is significant that Hereward's first trial as a warrior outlaw is to take on this humanoid bear. This trial allies him with the monstrosity of nature, like Beowulf and Grettir, two other heroes whose narratives are closely allied with the dual theme of nature and animality on the one hand, and exile on the other. Both of these heroes undergo a first trial in their youth that involves wrestling either a bear (Grettir) or a violent humanoid troll that displays some bearish qualities such as claws, sharp teeth, and bipedal locomotion (Beowulf). That this is not simply a literary motif added by the redactor is buttressed by the fact that women and girls "in choris canebant" about Hereward's feat with the bear. This suggests that there is a folkloric affinity between animal combat/companionship and outlawry. The women sung the

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<sup>244</sup> *GH*, app. 50-51.

songs and legend of the bear accreted to Hereward because he is simply that type of hero. This strange episode attaches Hereward firmly to the saga tradition of interaction between bears and humans, a strange symbiotic relationship of respect and antagonism. It also provides the first hint of Hereward's special kinship with animals, something that appears necessary for outlaw narratives. Ultimately, however, the bestial outlaw motifs have momentarily wrested control of the narrative away from the author's intentions.

In perhaps what is a doubling of the battle with beasts motif, Hereward must also battle a boastful and fearsome berserker named 'Rough Scab,' or 'Iron Sore,' whose name in Latin, *Ulcus Ferreus*, sounds like a direct translation of a typical Old Norse nickname. This *Ulcus Ferreus* is threatening to marry a reluctant princess in Cornwall, but Hereward defends her in a memorable fight. *Ulcus Ferreus* plays the role of the berserker – easily angered, boasting, demanding princesses, threatening to skin his enemies (he intends to scalp Hereward) – and thus he must be challenged and put in his place by the real hero, Hereward, who compares favorably in terms of behavior, but only marginally. After a long combat, Hereward ultimately destroys the berserker by spearing him through his anus in a horrifying violation that reads as a perverse kind of poetic justice.

This grotesque battle with the sexually threatening *Ulcus Ferreus* links up thematically with the rapist bear encounter in the earlier chapter, as both deal with rape and abduction. The bear and *Ulcus Ferreus* both carry off women, as do the 'berserkers' in Norse folklore. The theme of rape is doubled, as the two monstrous



sexual threats of the bear and the Cornwall giant are both destroyed by our hero. Hereward, as the one chosen to fight such figures, is ultimately implicated in their ethics; he enters a gray area of wildness, as do most other heroes who must rescue women from giant assailants – Corineus the giant-killer, Arthur when he rescues the princess from the Mont St. Michel giant, Egil and Bodvar Bjarki, who constantly battle berserkers who try to ravage women, and Hereward all must enter the rapists' territory and destroy them using whatever means necessary. In the process, they symbolically assume their opponents' bestial natures. As a further parallel between Beowulf, Boðvar Bjarki, and Grettir, Hereward's heroism with the monstrous bear and his victory against the savage Ulcus Ferreus earns him the jealousy of the king's other retainers, again, foreshadowing his doom as an outlaw to be the victim of treachery.

In addition to his more prosaic struggles against authority, Hereward also saves some more endangered princess, is shipwrecked, and works for foreign princes. All of these actions are closely related to the kinds of deeds we see performed in the sagas about great heroes. Hereward also fights (and in this account, kills) the Duke of Munster, who is modeled on the Irish King Brian Boru, in an epic battle that is notably similar to the battle of Clontarf, which exists in the saga record.<sup>245</sup> Again, we have a motif that exists in multiple sources, and is evidence of a

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<sup>245</sup> See E.O. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslensk Fornrit 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1954), 449-53.

thriving oral tradition centered on major historical event with repercussions for multiple ethnic groups. Hereward is a member of the English Viking allies of the Scandinavian king Sihtric 'Silkenbeard' in the great Battle of Clontarf, a story told across the Insular North Atlantic as well as in Celtic lands.<sup>246</sup> In the version of the story preserved in the *GH*, Hereward is inserted into the center of the story's action. Although unsurprisingly unattested elsewhere, Hereward attacks Brian Boru in his tent and kills him. This makes him look quite savage. The account in Hereward shows us that not only strictly Scandinavian and Celtic groups preserved the story, but also the account circulated in Anglo areas, and all were part of a greater cultural group that preserved important narratives in various forms. We gain a picture of a more integrated storytelling region than generally acknowledged.

Other aspects of the uncouth bestial outlaw motif also show up in the narrative of Hereward. At times, the hero is little more than a wild man, following his own disturbing codes of behavior. For example, Hereward's attack on the drunken Normans who have taken over his estate has surprising echoes of Grendel's behavior. Trying to sleep nearby in hiding, he hears harp music and the Norman usurpers' drunken hall merriment. He becomes fiercely angry, moved to attack that night. As he makes his way towards his family's hall, he puts his brother's head in a sack, and then attacks the hall, killing all inside. He then displays his enemies' heads

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<sup>246</sup> See J.H. Todd, ed., *The War of the Gædhil with the Gaill*, Rolls 48 (London: N.p., 1867), 184-211.

outside his reclaimed residence, and from that point on, everyone is afraid to visit his hall.

In other moments of grotesque animality, Hereward bleeds on a plate at a feast, unequivocally and defiantly breaking the blood taboo so that the other feasters “cursed him roundly, shouting out that he was a fiendish and monstrous man.”<sup>247</sup>

In a move that is typical of Hereward and other outlaws, Hereward is unaffected by their horror; he rides the boundary between beast and man with ease. Similarly, he gets into a violent, pitched battle with a group of aggressive cooks while infiltrating William’s camp. They want to shave the disguised Hereward’s beard from his face with kitchen cleavers, and, faced with this affront to his person and his dignity, he flies into an ill-advised violent rage, over which he appears to have little control. Predictably, chaos ensues in the kitchen, and again, blood presumably is spattered about, damaging the stores. In the famous description of the supposedly utopian hideout in Ely shared by monks and rebels, we gain a picture of a society of men whose every meal is martial; in heroic Anglo-Saxon fashion, the monks and warriors eat in a great hall with their shields hanging on the wall, ever ready, even at mealtimes, for attack and battle. In this we see marvelous, the violent, the wild, the uncontrollable motifs of the bestial outlaw tradition seeping through the seams of this patchwork of a narrative here.

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<sup>247</sup> *GH*, 22-23.

## *Fenland Fights*

The stories of Hereward focus intently on the outlaw's physical surroundings. Some of the most stirring passages are those dealing with the fenland region. Perhaps more than any other outlaw narrative, the fenland bogs, meres, islands, and forests come into sharp focus throughout Hereward's story, and, what is even more interesting, they are viewed from many different perspectives. The fens are at different times in the Hereward narratives gloomy, macabre, resistant, edenic, mysterious, blessed, and cursed. They hold such a fascination for the author of the *GH* in particular, that he explores them from many different angles throughout the story. Although the fens are a narrative focus throughout the *Gest*, I want to focus on three chapters in particular that depict the conflict between William and Hereward in the fenland, because in their juxtaposition of two completely different visions of the fenland they most effectively show the author's ambivalence toward and fascination with the fenland.

In chapter twenty, some soliders working for William spot some of the rebels across the water, and they shout out insults at them, deploring the fact that the outlaws' rebellion has forced them to lie in wait on the margins of the repellant fenland. The complaint of the soldiers and the description of the environment of the fens is very specific, and it betrays an anxiety about the active malevolence of the fenlands. The soldiers dread swimming or wading through dark waters filled with sharp reeds and sinkholes or becoming mired in treacherous marsh:

Quae non infesta vis inimici vos ulterius ad hoc sollicitet, in invisa illa  
palude ultra habitare et per luteam paludem atque inter aquarum

gurgites et arundinum asperitates sequi inermem, in proximo una die  
cum eo omnes morti tradendos.<sup>248</sup>

This is a hellish landscape, not fit for human habitation, according to William's men. There is nothing redeeming about it, and it is worse than useless to them; all it can do is impede progress or even destroy human lives. But this passage is also an almost photographic, or cinematographic, description of marshland. Hellish it may be, but it is tellingly detailed; the sharp reeds, the muck, the uncontrollable tides, someone has seen these and knows them intimately.

In the next chapter, William has realized that there is little chance of successfully luring the outlaws out, so, with his typical blend of resourcefulness and ruthlessness, he begins to build a causeway over the river into the fenland:

Ubi adductis instrumentis et structuris lignorum et lapidum et ex  
omni genere struis, aggregationem in palude, viam licet nimis sibi  
perinutilem et angustam, straverunt, ad magnum quippe flumen  
apud predictum locum, scilicet Abrebede, etiam in aqua maximas  
arbores et trabes conjunctas collocaverunt, subterius connexis pellibus  
bidentium integre et versipelles excoriatis et aere plenis infusis, ut  
onus supereuntium melius sustentaretur et pondus. <sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> App. 80. "For this hostile band, although not dangerous, may eventually force us to live in this detestable swamp, and to chase them unarmed through muddy marsh, swirling water, and sharp reeds. Every one of them is destined to an early death, for the king has already surrounded the whole island on all sides with his army, and has closed off the area so that he may destroy its inhabitants."

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 80. "Having brought there tools and fitments of timber and stone, and heaps of all kinds of things, they built a causeway through the swamp, although it was narrow and quite useless to them. Moreover, close to the big river near this place, that is to say Aldreth, they assembled in the water large tree-trunks joined together with beams, and underneath tied whole sheep-skins, flayed and reversed and fully inflated so that the weight of those going over it might be better borne."

In the *GH*, William's causeway avails him naught, but it is constructed of many of the area's natural resources, large inflated sheepskins, a train of large felled tree trunks and many rocks, all brought to the site in such quantities that they lie around in great piles. The cost is astronomical for William, and, perhaps, for those supplying the sheepskins and tree trunks. Certainly this harvest is not easy on the fenland ecology.

When William's attacking army begins to cross into the fens on the causeway, the men overload it in their eagerness for the spoils of war and the expensive bridge plunges into the water and drags men below the surface:

Quo facto, tanta multitudo irruens super congressa est, inter alia auro et argento sitabundi quod in insula non parum putabatur abaconsum, quatenus illi qui ante festinantes processerant cum ipsa via quam fecerant demersi sunt, et qui in medio comitatu erant in palude aquosa et profunda etiam absorpti sunt. Pauci quidem et ex his qui retro sequuti sunt, pene egressis et projectis armis, ex unda voluntantes per lutum vix evaserunt. Sic ergo, nemine vix persequente illos, in palude et aquis innumerabiles perierunt.<sup>250</sup>

One gets the sense that this author deplores this as a terrible waste of resources and human life. On account of their greed for the spoils of war, the soldiers, sheepskins, and tree trunks are all lost, and the redactor even informs us that in his own day he

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<sup>250</sup> App. 82. "When this was finished such a multitude rushed onto it all at once, greedy for the gold and silver and other things, not a little of which was thought to be hidden in the Isle, that those who went hurrying in front were drowned together with the road itself they had made. Those who were in the middle of the company were swallowed up in the watery and deep swamp as well. A few of those who were following at the rear got away with difficulty, flinging down their weapons, wallowing in the water and making their way through the mud. Thus in this way, with hardly anybody pursuing them, great numbers perished in the swamp and waters."

has seen the skeletons of the men who died that day pulled out of the bog in rotting armor. His description of the fenland skeletons smacks of personal experience: “ex quibus isti usque in hodie diem multi adhuc ex profundis illarum aquarum in armis putrefactis abstrahuntur.”<sup>251</sup> The area is haunted by this catastrophe decades later, and even the mind of our author is filled with the traumatic memory of this great, pointless, destruction. Thus according to this perspective, the fenland is a gloomy, dangerous place haunted by the memory of battles, natural elements, and wasted human effort. In short, William’s building strategy, and his general attitude towards natural resources, does not work in the fens.

The next chapter, which details the outlaws’ paradisiacal refuge in Ely, is juxtaposed against the two previous chapters, which are filled with the specific horrors of the fenland, thus offering two models for living with and in the fenland, one ecologically sound, and one extreme and useless. The society of the fenland rebels is an interesting model. It is created by monks who are afraid that they will lose control of their abbey. Thus, they allow refugees to join them and to defend their place:

Qua de re monachi loci illius alieni subijci verentes, magis laborare maluerunt quam in servitutem redigi, exules, praejudicatos, exhaereditatos, et suos parentes idcirco ad se congregantes, suum locum et insulam non insigniter de eis et aliis munierunt, et penitus illa pro tanti exercitus numero non aggravatur, et inimico non

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<sup>251</sup> App. 82. “And to this day many of them are dragged out of the depths of those waters in rotting armor. I’ve sometimes seen this myself.”

aggravatur.<sup>252</sup>

This results in a society comprised of all kinds of humans working together, performing their work in an idyllic, if martial, state. Ploughmen, reapers, hunters, fowlers, trappers, monks, earls, and soldiers husband the landscape in a just and ordered world in harmony with nature. The basic land husbandry is not neglected; in fact, it is amplified.

ubi ob iiij. regum et regnorum obsidionem arator manum ab aratro  
non advertat, nec messoris dextra a messe vacillet, nec venator ibi  
yenabula non observat, nec auceps avibus insidiari juxta ripas  
fluminum non desistat et in silvis, qui decore nimis in eadem insula et  
opulente pene in omnibus animantibus sunt.<sup>253</sup>

Everyone does his job well, harvesting the bounty of the landscape. The fare is broken down into its appropriate seasons, lending this vision of the fens a sense of balance and order, in harmony with the cyclic passing of time. For example, birds are harvested at certain times, eels at another. Contrary to previous readings (remember Swanton's comment quoted earlier in the chapter) this is not an

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<sup>252</sup> App 85. "For this cause, fearing subjection to foreigners, the monks of that place risked endangering themselves rather than be reduced to servitude, and gathering to themselves outlaws, the condemned, the disinherited, those who had lost their parents, and such like, they put their place and the island in something of a state of defense. There's no pressure on account of the numbers of the army over there, and they aren't oppressed by the enemy."

<sup>253</sup> App 86. "For although besieged by four kings and their subjects, the ploughman doesn't take his hand from the plough, nor does the right hand of the reaper hesitate in reaping; the hunter doesn't neglect his hunting spears, nor does the fowler stop lying in wait for birds by the banks of rivers and in woods, so those in the Isle are well and plentifully supplied with almost all living things."



imagined, idealized landscape. The abundance of the fens is a marvel to writers from Bede onward. And the landscape *is* abundant:

Nam eo tempore quo avea aquaticae pennas mutant et habitum, illuc saepe aviculas captas vidi multas, nonnunquam centum et aliquando ducentas et plus, et saepissime non multum inferioris numeri ac etiam ex una aqua mille. Ex silvis namque quae in insula sunt eo modo in uno anni tempore ardearum satis copia est, excepta abundantia ferarum et pecorum.<sup>254</sup>

This sensitive, detail-oriented, and rhapsodic vision of the fens is particularly interesting when viewed in contrast to the dark times in England outside of this neverland. Under William's rule, people were seen as animals, or pawns, ruled by a hardhearted leader with exceptional strategic abilities. His close supporters gained all, but the lower ranks gained nothing but their lives in their obedience. The edenic landscape of Hereward's fenland retreat shows the exact opposite of the stressed-out state outside the swamp. In Hereward's alternate reality, men of substance, churchmen and peasants all work together toward the common good in a nearly rankless society in deep harmony with its landscape in sharp contrast to William's forces' destructive policy toward the landscape. Again we are seeing a good example of the bestial outlaw tradition's signature blend of down-to-earth natural observation with idealism.

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<sup>254</sup> App. 86. "At the time when the water-fowl are molting and changing their appearance, I've commonly seen trappers there bringing in lots of small birds: very often a hundred, sometimes two hundred or more, and occasionally not far off a thousand from one stretch of water. Similarly from the woods that are in the Isle there is at one time of the year a good supply of heron, quite apart from the abundance of wild and domesticated animals."

## *Into the Woods*

Once Hereward has been flushed out of Ely, he, like other bestial outlaws, spends most of his time being harried by attackers in his forest abode, on the run after his fortress in the fens has been compromised.<sup>255</sup> One of the most peculiar and significant passages in the *Gesta Herewardi* involves the apparition of a spectral wolf, which guides the lost outlaws through the treacherous mists of a forested fenland:

Dum enim intempesta nocte et caligine per devia silvarum hinc inde ubi se verterent nescirent, immanis lupus ante eos affuit, sicut canis domesticus congratulans eis, et in via secedens proprius ante eos ibat. Quem tamen in caligine tenebrarum eanem album propter canitiem aestimantes, alternatim sibi invicem exhortati sunt, ut canem sequerentur proprius de villa illum asserentes. Quod et fecerunt, et in medio noctis silentio dum se prosperatos ex tramite intelligerent, et suam viam agnoscerent, subito candele ardentes et adhaerentes lanceis omnium militum apparuerunt, quae tamen non valde lucidae sed velut ille quae vulgus appellant candelae nympharum. Nec enim aliquis eorum evellere aut extinguere omnino eas potuit vel de manu projicere. Unde valde sibi invicem admirantes, et, licet obstupescerent, suam viam cernentes semper duce lupo perrexerunt. Lucescente siquidem die, omnes, quod eis mirabile fuit, ductorem suum lupum esse tandem comperere. Et dum inter se de his quae contigerant sibi haesitarent, lupus non comparuit et candelae, evanuerunt, atque ipsi ubi ire disposuerant ultra Stanford pervenerunt, et suum iter prosperatum intelligentes, gratias egerunt Deo, admirantes de his quae sibi evenere.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> See Cap 30.

<sup>256</sup> App 100-101. " For while in the stormy night and gloom they were wandering hither and thither through the forests, not knowing where they were going, a huge wolf came in front of them, fawning on them like a tame dog and walking along in front of them down the path. In the obscuring gloom they mistook it for a white dog because of its grey coat, and urged one another to follow the dog closely, declaring that it must have come from some village. This they did. And in the midst of the night, while they discovered that they had succeeded in getting out of the by-way and recognizing the road, suddenly there appeared burning lights clinging to the soldiers'

At first, the author hints that this large white creature is a hound, but even in the piecey Latin of the *Gesta* we suspect otherwise. After an eerie night of following this glowing ‘hound’ while the outlaws’ lances and staves are surrounded with luminous will-o-the-wisps, the men reach safety, and in the early dawn, discover their savior to be a giant wolf – the sign of their shame as well as their salvation – which vanishes in the dawn’s light. As in the local legend of St. Edmund, this outlawed creature acts against his rapacious nature in rescuing these helpless men. The unnatural size and behavior of this creature both amplifies and mitigates the strangeness of this fenland.<sup>257</sup> Lost in this gloomy, stormy forest, the bioluminescence of the marshland manifests itself around the soldiers’ weapons. Again, as in the fecund environs of Ely, nature is on overdrive, as it helps this last of the English defend his land against tyrannical incursion.

In an ironic turn from the point of view of a modern person looking at the long view of the history of colonialism in Great Britain, Hereward, the loyal Anglo-Saxon, becomes the hunted reviled animal in the new normal colonial narrative, just

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lances -- not very bright, but like those popularly called will-o-the-wisps. No one could get rid of them, or extinguish them, or throw them away. Whereupon, greatly marvelling amongst themselves, although they were stupefied they could see their way, and went on led by the wolf. And then with dawning day they all eventually found to their astonishment that their guide had been a wolf. And while they were at a loss to know what had happened to them, the wolf disappeared, the lights vanished, and they had got to where they wanted, beyond Stamford. And realizing that their journey had been successful, they gave thanks to God, marvelling at what had happened to them.”

<sup>257</sup> In perhaps another parallel with the *HSK/Beowulf* material, the Norse proverb, found in *HSK*, comes to mind: “Can it be that wolves are plotting with predators?” or translated more literally, “Can it be that outlaw/ wolves are plotting with wolves?” In *ON*: “vargar með ulfum” (see n. 15, 80 in *HSK*)

as, arguably, the Britons were in the Anglo-Saxon migrations. As the representative of his superseded race, Hereward now occupies the fens and remote areas once inhabited by the natives and monsters his own people once pushed out and exterminated centuries earlier. His ally, the grey wolf, is the very same that his own ancestors sought to control in their own colonial zeal.

Thus, in some ways, this recurring tale of bestial outlawry is a story of poetic justices and inevitability. As a narrative of the relationship of the English (whoever they may be at the time) and nature, it is truly powerful. As a crowning irony, the Isle of Ely itself, once a sort of *locus amoenus* of the past, abundant in game, food, and fish, a prelapsarian ecosystem in harmony with its inhabitants (as well as providing a prototype for the this new type of outlaw narrative with its emphasis on nature as a great social equalizer), will too be tamed by the Norman energies, drained and made fruitful and at least a little less mysterious.

Gaimar's account of the Hereward material is also quite intriguing. Gaimar seems to have drawn into his larger poetic history a body of orally-transmitted material about Hereward, and while his account concurs with the story as told in the *Gesta* in some ways, it is in other respects very different indeed. Throughout the narrative of Hereward's life and deeds, Gaimar's authorial tone is remarkably ambivalent about Norman interests versus English/Danish ones, likely due to the fact that the story is being collected and put together from accounts that are sympathetic to the English/Danish resistance. His narrative begins with the

dispossession of many Danish and English lands in the North, and we learn that William, in his anger, not only took lands, but destroyed them:

Engleis, Daneis l'unt departi.  
Tel an prist part, ki n'en joi;  
Car li reis vint, la cite prist,  
Daneis, Noreis, tuz les oscist.  
Li reis Willame donc ne fine,  
Tut ad destruit tresk'e[n] Tine. (5447-5452)

William's conquest of this area – a “deliberate scorched earth policy” according to Marjorie Chibnall – is complete and absolutely destructive, and the language Gaimar uses is ambivalent at best.<sup>258</sup> Regarding William's punitive harrying of the north, even the Conqueror's most laudatory chroniclers were unable to seal this act with their stamp of approval. It was, as Bates has noted, a war crime, a horrifying act of genocide and brutality towards the land, its people, and the nation. In the *HDE*, the resisting lords of the land become outlaws, and again, Gaimar is careful in his choice of words: “Udlaghes sunt Willame as reis.”<sup>259</sup> They are outlaws – and Gaimar uses the Norse loanword ‘utlaghe’ here – to William. William, angered by their resistance, destroys the North of England.

Immediately after the description of the absolute destruction of the Norse and the Northern landscape (and Gaimar seems to equate the two), we turn to Hereward, the most outstanding of these Northern outlaws:

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<sup>258</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 18.

<sup>259</sup> 5462.

Des utlaghes mulz i aveit,  
Uns gentilz hom lur sire esteit,  
Ki Hereward aveit a nun,  
Un des meillurs del region.

Hereward's story is thus linked with the wasting of the North, with the dwindling of Norse as well as Anglo-Saxon hopes, and with the tragically changing landscape of the post-Conquest period.

One might expect the use of animal similes and metaphors to describe the hunted band of outlaws to fall off in this abbreviated account, but the surprising fact of the matter is that, if anything, Gaimar's abridgement of Hereward's story brings his bestial nature even further to the fore. Similarly, the landscape is intensified, and the topography of the story is used almost telegraphically to express mood and genre. Hereward and his pack of outlaws prey upon the very land the Normans took from them, shepherds forced to become wolves; Gaimar emphasizes this painful irony in his verse. "Puis unt preié mult del pais/ Ke li Normant ourent purpris."<sup>260</sup> The Normans' snatching of their land forces the outlaws to become predators themselves. The diction echoes the language used to describe highwaymen and predatory leaders, but it is ambivalent, refusing to take sides, seemingly damning both parties.

Whereas in the *GH* the outlaws lived a sustainable, self-sufficient life in the fenland of Ely for some time, in Gaimar's account, Hereward's holdout in the fens is

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<sup>260</sup> 5475-6.

distinctly short-lived. We learn that the outlaws intended to spend the winter in their fenland quarters, but William the builder has other ideas; he builds a bridge across the marsh, calls together his vassals, some mercenaries, and soldiers and surrounds the fenland holdouts by both land and sea, forestalling their escape. The list of 'outlaw-hunters' is extensive: "Son ost sumond, manda guerriers, / Franceis, Engleis, e chevaliers; / Devers la mer mist mainals, / Buzecharles, sergantz, haspels, / E alter gent, dunt tant i out, / Nul des asis aer n'en pout./ E desrechef par les boscages furent gardez tuz les passages; / E le mareis tut environ / Fu bien gardé par contençon." In bridging the marshland, William's control of the English landscape is the decisive action in Gaimar's account, as it is in the *GH*. Again, William's massive causeway is mentioned, but Gaimar spends less time describing the natural materials used to construct it. Instead, he focuses on the different types of people involved in this successful outlaw hunt. The result is the same, however; the outlaws, including the last in line for the Anglo-Saxon throne, surrender.

All but one; Hereward escapes with a few of his closest companions by pretending to be a fish. A fisherman "En son batel les recuilli, / de ros e de glai tut les coveri, / Vers les gardiens prist a nager, / Si com un seir dust anuter, / Mult pres des loges od sa nef."<sup>261</sup> The Normans observe the fisherman passing by in a tense

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<sup>261</sup> 5507-5511.

moment, but they miss the special ‘fish’ lying at the bottom of the boat. Hereward emerges in the dark, ready to avenge his humiliation in the fens of Ely:

Fors de la ne fist Hereward,  
De hardement semblout leupart;  
Ses compaignons apres issirent,  
Desuz un bois le tref choisirent.<sup>262</sup>

The minute he emerges from the fishing boat, Hereward morphs again, becoming less a concealed fish than a rapacious leopard as he attacks a tent full of unsuspecting Normans at their meal:

K’en dirrai! Li chevalier  
Furent surpris a lur manger.  
Cil entrent, od haches es mains;  
De bien ferir ne sunt vilains,  
Normans osciserent vint e sis.<sup>263</sup>

Again, the grotesque litotes concludes the brutal massacre – they were ‘surprised’ at their meal by axe-wielding natives. Again, Hereward breaks the ‘mealtime blood’ taboo by destroying his enemies as they sit eating: “Grant fu l’effrei par les ostels, /De la fuite sunt comunels.”<sup>264</sup>

Gaimar’s attitude toward Hereward shifts after this episode for a while, as he describes Hereward and his companions as felonious men: “Meillé l’urent envers le rei/ A mult grant tort e a beslai.”<sup>265</sup> Previously, it almost seems the narrative has

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<sup>262</sup> 2219-5522.

<sup>263</sup> 5525-5529.

<sup>264</sup> 5531-2.

<sup>265</sup> 5567-8.



been on the outlaws' side. One wonders if the act of breaking the Normans' peaceful repast with slaughter has turned the poet-historian against his subject, or if Gaimar is just including a new narrative from a different source which disapproves of the acts of the English outlaw.

As we have seen, neither the author of the *GH* nor Gaimar seems to have too much control over this figure – Gaimar can't seem to find a focused tone with which to describe him, nor a comfortable way to approach the landscape of contestation. The *GH* author seems to veer wildly between rhapsody – uncommonly detailed in its attention to the ecological economy and human harmony with nature, and a nightmarish vision of a landscape which is fundamentally malignant. Thus, neither is successful, truly, in making Hereward, the great rebel leader of the Conquest, into any kind of standard bearer, either for a noble resistance or a doomed and misguided rebellion. He becomes instead a wild card, under the influence not only of politics, but of the natural environment and the already established morphology of the English outlaw tradition. We cannot read either of these works as unsuccessful literature, however, because they fail to make a unified political point. Instead, we must marvel at the multivalent way in which both narratives incorporate many different voices and perspectives in a powerful Bakhtinian polyphony. But the polyphony is not only a result of the influence of many different voices, but the influence of that rhizomatically uncontrollable morphology of the bestial outlaw, which ultimately erupts into any contained narrative message and problematizes it.

## *Extinction*

Like other bestial outlaws, Hereward spends most of his time being harried by attackers in his forest abode. He is depicted as the 'last of his breed', an endangered figure who stands for some outmoded ideal, for a different, extinct time with a different set of extinct values. Hereward, the last Anglo-Saxon hero, Robin Hood and Gamelyn, both figured as the last true nobleman forced out of his land by his integrity, and Grettir, the last hero of the Viking age – all of these figures are portrayed as the last and the greatest of their moribund breed. This also seems atypical of Anglo-Norman romance, which glories in a culture whose star is in the ascendant, as we will see in the coming chapter, which deals with the exploits of the Anglo-Norman outlaw Fulk fitz Waryn.

In Gaimar's account, unlike that found in the *Gesta Herewardi* (where Hereward surrenders to William and lives out the rest of his life in peace), the *HDE* Hereward meets his death heroically and tragically, as he is fittingly ambushed by Normans while eating his dinner: He morphs again, first into a lion, as he nobly makes himself ready for battle, and then into a wild boar, as he is held at bay and stabbed by many assailants; in his slow and painful last stand he manages to kill most of his attackers before finally being felled, fittingly, by a javelin.<sup>266</sup> This impressive final battle takes up a significant percentage of Gaimar's narrative, suggesting that he had access to a detailed account or perhaps, that he liked this

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<sup>266</sup> 196-7.

section of Hereward's story enough to expand upon it. What appealed to Gaimar? Was it the tragic end of a doomed figure? Was it the extended metaphor of the boar-at-bay? Was it the admiration of the men who ultimately destroyed this hero, when they note that if there had been three more men like Hereward, the Normans never could have conquered? Perhaps all of these powerfully moving elements prompted Gaimar to expand upon Hereward's death.

Although in the *Gesta Herewardi* Hereward finally submits himself to William's rule, Gaimar's account in the *Histoire Des Angleis* does not depict Hereward reconciling himself completely with the Normans. Doomed and tragic, he holds out to the end, until he is outnumbered by Normans and killed dramatically. This, even though it appears in a French source, reads like classic saga material.

### ***Conclusion***

The saga influence on the *Gesta Herewardi* has been noted before; the more interesting thing is that most examples of French influence can be paralleled with a closer Norse analogue. For a particularly salient concluding example of this problem, the famous statement that people 'in chorus canebant' songs of Hereward 'in tripliciter' is seen as either an indigenous polyphonic Anglo-Danish singing style or a reference to troubadour song. The first seems more likely. Moreover, in the notes to Michael Swanton's edition, there is not a single concrete reference to French sources and analogues while I found nine concrete references to Norse ones. The argument can be made that the *Gesta* is as much a product of Anglo-Scandinavian

influence, as Anglo-Norman. In terms of chronology, this is logical; if written down during the lifetime of Hereward's companions, it is a product of recent post-Conquest literary activity. It makes sense that a story of Anglo-Scandinavian resistance to Norman power would also show resistance to the influence of the cultural products of that same society.

In conclusion, at times it may seem that this study is revisiting those old anxieties of the Victorian and wartime scholars who set out to prove English superiority by looking to an ancient past unsullied by continental (and especially French) influence and doing their best to extricate their early literature from the horrible fate of seeming French. In this case, however, too many specifically Norse motifs have been identified as French, when the far more logical choice appears to have been Scandinavian. We can now revise Holt's influential statement that the *Gesta Herewardi* is a "peculiar and interesting literary amalgam which owes something to Norse saga and much to French epics of feudal resistance to an overlord."<sup>267</sup> We will invert it now, concluding that it is a "peculiar and interesting literary amalgam which owes *much* to Norse saga and *something* to French epics of feudal resistance to an overlord." It is particularly important to note the analogues and affinities that this romance shares with saga literature because many of the traits of the English outlaw tradition are ones that are very close to Scandinavian

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<sup>267</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, 63.

narratives of outlawry, and acknowledging that the *Gesta Herewardi* preserves evidence of a direct link between the two traditions allows us to draw upon themes and motifs preserved in the Scandinavian tradition to further elucidate our English outlaws.

There were others like Hereward, and stories were being told about them. Keen notes that Hereward is not the only Anglo-Saxon resistance fighter preserved in legend: “twice the *Gesta* makes reference to one Brumannus, who captured a Norman abbot and ducked him into the sea in a sack. The author seems to expect his readers to find the story familiar enough, but no other traditions concerning this obscure figure survive. About Eadric the Wild, who was in revolt in the marches of Wales between the years of 1067 and 1069, legends also seem to have been collected. In the chronicles of Wygmore Abbey, we find apocryphal stories of his struggles with the Norman lord, Ralph de Mortemer. In Walter Mapes’ *Book of Courtiers’ Trifles*, written at the end of the twelfth century, we find Eadric, like Hereward, becoming the hero of romantic adventure.”

### ***Epilogue: William the Conqueror, William the Builder, William the Hunter***

By way of transition to the next chapter, in which we will explore a different colonial landscape, let us take a moment to think about the other major player in these stories: William the Conqueror. The notion of William the builder is repeated often in the post-Conquest outlaw narratives. More than in other texts, the emphasis in characterizing the conquering king falls upon his large-scale construction of

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edifices, most of which consolidated his tactical position and irrevocably changed the landscape for the English. To add insult to injury, most of these buildings were constructed using forced Anglo-Saxon labor. In the words of Carpenter, “Reorganization of manors also led to a substantial decline in the numbers of sokemen and free peasants. Peasants labored on the new castles and fled or starved to death when a Norman army burnt its way through the countryside.”<sup>268</sup> The memory of this outrage, and the corresponding representation of a resisting landscape, is retained in these outlaw narratives. The outlaw narratives preserve a uniquely negative vision of the Conquest and its environmental costs. In their fixation on the changing landscape, they map the otherwise difficult to find alternative history of the Conquest, in which the human, economic, and environmental costs of this traumatic conquest are measured and recorded. In the *Gesta Herewardi* and Gaimar’s *HDE*, we are able to watch William build a causeway or bridge across the fens in an attempt to flush out the outlaws. The two narratives describe vastly different results of this attempt to manipulate this resistant landscape, but both focus upon it.

In the post-Conquest narratives of the lives of the outlaws Hereward and Fulk fitz Waryn, great emphasis is placed on William’s strategic building of castles, the iconic Norman addition to the landscape, but also bridges, moats, dams, and

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<sup>268</sup> Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, 78 (see chap. 2, n. 35).

market towns.<sup>269</sup> With these structures he controlled the landscape and subjugated the people, but he also changed the face of Britain in doing so. It became – at least according to the outlaw narratives under examination in this study – more humanized, less pastoral, and more military. It also required natural resources which had to be harvested from the land – vast quarries were delved, tall trees cut, and rivers diverted or dammed at one man’s will. Holt makes some memorable remarks about this building project:

Much Norman building, of course, survives for us still to see, and it is difficult to look upon it without absorbing its antiquity. That is misleading. Forget it. Forget the moss-grown castle walls and Tennyson’s dying echoes and think instead of a new housing estate, or Canary Wharf ten years ago, or the Barbican thirty years ago, or Tokyo in the era of post-war reconstruction. The Normans rivaled this. Ninety castles are recorded by 1100, twenty-five of them royal, mostly motte and baileys, structures of earth and timber, but some of them already built in stone. By the same date all English cathedrals were being rebuilt or newly constructed. So were many monasteries. Today we only see a small proportion of this vast effort. If we could see it whole it would quickly be apparent that it represented a vast capital investment, probably a greater capital investment *per capita* than this country has ever seen, at least prior to the industrial revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>270</sup>

Such godlike, decisive power not only to shape the lives of generations, but also generations of ecosystems was absolutely unprecedented.

But there is one great irony in William’s control of his landscape, and this is something the outlaw narratives gleefully seize upon. William is a notoriously avid

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<sup>269</sup> C.f. Bates, *William the Conqueror*, 122-23, Golding 74-75.

<sup>270</sup> J.C. Holt, *Colonial England* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1997), 5-6.

hunter; one calls to mind the famous statement by his eulogist in the E version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that he 'loved stags as if he were their father.'<sup>271</sup> He was known to have been devoted to the chase, hunting often and successfully. His prowess as a hunter makes him, however, a bit beastly. His excessive identification with animals is a questionable trait, at least according to the chronicler. And it only intensifies the public perception of him as an inhuman, sharp, predatory man.<sup>272</sup> So the great irony of many of the outlaw narratives, starting with Hereward's, is that William (or other stand-in kings), the great hunter of beast and man, is so thrown off balance by a rebel who effectively uses wild or forested space to resist a man who is supposed to understand and control it so well. In turn, the outlaws' success forces William to become even more wily and predatory, stalking and striving to destroy his quarry if he can. Historically, this was the fate not only of Hereward, but of all those who rebelled; William's response was amplified and brutal towards Eadric the Wild, and towards the Northern rebels, as we have seen:

Peasants were slaughtered, crops in store burnt, animals killed, and tools and ploughs destroyed so that no seed would be sown for the next harvest. A Durham writer described infected corpses decaying in the streets and survivors eating horses, cats, and dogs and selling themselves into slavery...William's purpose, brutally carried out, had been to ensure that the North could not support rebellion in the

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<sup>271</sup> Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, year 1086, cited in F. A. Ogg, *A Source Book of Medieval History* (New York: American Book Company, 1908).

<sup>272</sup> According to Bates, William's "cruelty was a theme taken up by several commentators," some of whom knew William personally (*William the Conqueror*, 93).



foreseeable future.<sup>273</sup>

Each time William is forced to hunt and ‘exterminate’ these pests, he seems more brutal, less human. One of the most amazing examples of his cold inhumanity, and one which fits quite well into the complex of animalistic motifs we are exploring in this monograph, is William’s celebration of the feast of Christmas “in the midst of the ruins of the city [of York], having, with his usual sense of the majesty of kingship, sent to Winchester for his crown and regalia in order to make an appropriate display of royal authority.”

A further irony, and one which was not lost upon chroniclers of the time, is that two of his sons, both avid hunters, died (or were brought down) while hunting. In their deaths we find a poetic justice; the great family of hunters has chosen to go down a path of brutality that ultimately deprives them of their humanity. Thus, it is fitting that they should suffer the same deaths as the beasts they hunted. William’s son William Rufus’ death in the New Forest, felled by a stealthy arrow, is a godly judgment, and it is deep in the realm of the outlaw’s life-cycle. In terms of biological behavior, the outlaws’ stealthy stalking makes them, in a way, a different species from the blustering aristocrats, with their extravagantly loud hunt, and this difference is disturbing and fearsome for the dominant power narrative. History backs up this claim – William Rufus, the son of William the Conqueror, was struck

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<sup>273</sup> Bates, *William the Conqueror*, 80-81.

dead by an unidentified arrow, and while many chroniclers insist that it was an accidental friendly fire from his hunting companion Walter, his body was not discovered until the following day, pierced through the lung by a single arrow.<sup>274</sup> In a way, the idea of a never-identified opponent shooting stealthily from behind a tree is more disturbing than the notion of a cloak-and-dagger assassination backed by institutional politics. The placeless stealth and marginality of the greenwood outlaw must have been terrifying.

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<sup>274</sup> See Chibnall, M., ed. and trans., *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, Oxford Medieval Texts 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968-1980), 288-290; Chibnall, M.A., ed. *History Of The Norman Kings (1066 - 1125)* (Cambridge, England: Llanerch, 1989), 288-290; and Warren Hollister, "The Strange Death of William Rufus" *Speculum* 48, no.4 (1973): 637-653.

## CHAPTER 6

### FRONTIER FAUVISM IN THE TALE OF FULK FITZ WARYN

American associations are not so much of the past, but of the present and the future...in looking over the yet uncultivated scene, the mind's eye may see far into futurity. Where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise temple and tower - mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness; the poet yet unborn shall sanctify the soil.<sup>275</sup>

In a popular political poem celebrating the capture of William de la Pole, the first duke of Suffolk, King Henry VI's henchmen Talbot and Beaumont act like their namesakes and heraldic symbols (both categories of hunting dogs – the Talbot is a breed and 'Beaumont' is a popular moniker for dogs who call in the hunt) and run the unpopular duke of Suffolk to ground like a fox being run to his hole. The energetic language of the poem unambiguously identifies the main characters with their heraldic animals and pushes their human actions into the realm of the animal and the hunt.<sup>276</sup>

Now is the Fox drevyn to hole; hoo to hym, hoo, hoo!  
Ffor and he crepe out, he wille yow alle undo.  
Now ye han founde parfite, love welles your game;  
For and ye renne countre, then be ye to blame.  
Sum of yow holdith with the Fox, and rennyth hare;

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<sup>275</sup> Thomas Cole, from "Essay on American Scenery," in *American Art 1700-1960: Sources and Documents*, ed. John W. McCoubrey (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: PrenticeHall, 1965).

<sup>276</sup> For a reading of this poem within the context of heraldry see Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*, 89.

But he þat tied Talbot oure doge, euylle mot he fare!  
 Ffor now we mys the black doge withe þe wide mouth;  
 Ffor he wolde have ronnen welle at þe Fox of the south.  
 And alle gooth bacward, and don is in the myre;  
 As they han deserued, so pay þey þer hire.  
 Now is tyme of lent, þe fox is in the Towre;  
 þefore sende hym Salesbury to be his confessoure.  
 Many mo þer bene, and we kowd hem knowe;  
 But won most begynne the daunce, and alle come arowe.  
 Loke þat your hunte blowe welle þy chase;  
 But he do welle is part, I beshrew is face!  
 This Fox at Bury slowe oure grete gandere;  
 Therfore at Tybome mony monne one hym wondere.

Once Suffolk has been captured, and the 'fox is in the Towre,' the animal metaphor abruptly changes, as Yamamoto and Scattergood have noted — he becomes a chained ape, a jackanapes:

Jack Napys, with his clogge,  
 Hath tiede Talbot oure gentill dogge.  
 Wherefore Beamownt, that gentill rache,  
 Hath brought Jack Napis in an evill cache.  
 Be ware, al menne, of that blame,  
 And namly ye of grete fame,  
 Spirituelle and temperall, be ware of this,  
 Or els hit will not be well, I-wis.  
 God save the kynge, and God forbede  
 That he such apes any mo fede.  
 And of þe perille that may be-fall  
 Be ware, dukes, erles, and barons alle.<sup>277</sup>

Gone is the fox-metaphor which was only appropriate as long as Suffolk was behaving like a wicked hunted beast.<sup>278</sup> Now, as a caged creature on display before

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<sup>277</sup> Cited from Rossell Hope Robbins' *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 186-7.

a victorious group, he becomes this apelike creature, a subhuman and monstrous thing fit only to be stared at, ridiculed, and finally destroyed.

Suffolk's identity as a hunted animal appears in yet another political 'text' of the time, one of the Devonshire Tapestries. I cite Yamamoto's description of its imagery in full here:

In the Otter and Swan tapestry, a dead otter hangs from a pole carried by a huntsman sounding his horn. John Talbot and his second wife, Margaret, point at the otter, although averting their gaze, while a pair of Talbot hounds snap at the beast's tail. Below, John Talbot, the elder John's heir and son of his first wife, digs more otters out of their holts, aided by another pair of Talbots. The play is upon Suffolk's family name, de la Pole, and the conflation of hunting imagery effectively reduces him to the level of an animal whom no one doubts it is right to track down and kill.<sup>279</sup>

The heraldic images of his crest, his family name, all of these latent images and creatures come to life and destroy Suffolk's humanity in the fictions of these texts. Poor Suffolk seems to suffer quite a number of these heraldic plays upon his name. His death by attack and execution at sea was immortalized in yet another work of art, the ballad "Six Dukes went a-fishing," collected by Percy Grainger in 1906. This ballad is believed by some scholars to be a corrupted account of the discovery of the decapitated corpse of the Duke of Suffolk on the seashore:

Six dukes went a-fishing,  
Down by yon sea-side,

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<sup>278</sup> See Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*, 89, and V.J. Scattergood's *Politics and poetry in the fifteenth century* (London, Blandford Press, 1971), 89.

<sup>279</sup> Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human*, 90.

One of them spied a dead body,  
Lain by the waterside.  
The one said to the other,  
These words I heard them say,  
"It's the royal Duke of Grantham,  
That the tide has washed away."  
They took him up to Portsmouth,  
To a place where was known,  
From there up to London,  
To the place where he was born.  
They took out his bowels,  
And stretched out his feet,  
And they balmed his body,  
With roses so sweet.  
Six dukes stood before him,  
Twelve raised him from the ground,  
Nine lords followed after him,  
In their black mourning gown.  
Black was their mourning,  
And white were the wands,  
And so yellow were the flamboys,  
That they carried in their hands.  
Now he lies betwixt two towers,  
He now lies in cold clay,  
And the Royal Queen of Grantham,  
Went weeping away.<sup>280</sup>

In his final metamorphosis, the Duke has become yet another creature fit for human capture and use—a 'fish.' His body is disemboweled, and in a way which strangely parallels the preparation of a fish for consumption, he is 'seasoned' and processed.<sup>281</sup>

The dark irony of this ballad, although collected hundreds of years later, certainly

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<sup>280</sup> Collected by Percy Grainger, 1906 in Lincolnshire. Cited from *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, ed. Ralph Vaughan Williams and A.L. Lloyd. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959).

<sup>281</sup> John Stow's *Annales* states that his enemies "left the body with the head lying there on the sand" (*The annales of England* (London: R. Newbury, 1592), 387-88).

seems in line with the tone and message of the earlier poems and images of William de la Pole.<sup>282</sup>

In his ultimate defeat and arrest, Suffolk has been successfully hunted by an assiduous 'pack' of noble dogs who do their job – which it is their nature to do – unerringly and well. The human winners of this particular political game seem proud to commission such works of art, which cheerfully cast them in animalistic roles. There is no shame in being a noble Talbot or Beaumont. In fact, as Yamamoto points out, "in real life, John Talbot's identity seems to have been thoroughly entertained with his animal familiars"; he hunted with Talbot hounds, sent them as rents to the crown for Sheffield Castle, and his friends refereed to him as "good dog Talbot."<sup>283</sup> But for Suffolk, the imagery which repeatedly casts him in the role of either degraded, captive, and near-human – the jackanapes – or variously as a fox, otter, or fish, fit only to be hunted and killed. These poetic metamorphoses emphasize his status as less-than human, something created for jubilant destruction. His identity is certainly not stable, since he can be referred to as an ape, a fox, and an otter, while his enemy's – a specific kind of hunting dog – is quite secure. It seems there is no hard and fast rule for heraldic animal symbolism. While some particularly stable [or one-dimensional] actors in a fiction can be represented by one

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<sup>282</sup> In part two of *Henry VI*, Suffolk is killed by pirates, and his last speech acts muse on the ignominy of this demise, but Shakespeare does not emphasize the fishiness of his death. See Act IV Scene I.

<sup>283</sup> Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human*, 91.

type of animal throughout a narrative because they consistently perform one kind of action – in Talbot’s case, steadfastly hunting down the Crown’s enemies – some characters are subject to ever-shifting signification. Like Suffolk, a figure who plays different roles throughout the dynamic tale, they can be a boar one minute, a hunted fox the next, and a wolf on the next page. They often wholly *become* whatever animal is appropriate for the action of the poem; the poetic descriptions go beyond simile and portray the once-human actors *as* animal, but they have no problem continuously shifting the characters’ animal identification to suit the plotline.

Interestingly enough, it seems the characters who lack agency, who do not have a unified reason for being which is consistent from episode to episode, are more prone to being depicted variously as different kinds of animals. Their lack of a single unified symbolic ‘familiar’ points to their lack of power, to their status as victims and villains. The heraldic devices or namesakes of the victimized figure become only part of a complex, ever-shifting, hybridized system of animal symbolism – they are not one animal, but many, fundamentally bestial in their pan-animality. Fulk Fitz Waryn, the hero of both Anglo-Norman and Middle English romance and historical figure, occupies this sort of ever-shifting symbolic space. He is at various points in the narrative his heraldic animal – a wolf, a hunted boar, a deer, and a monstrous monster-hunter throughout his story, and perhaps this dizzying array of signifying animals points us to one of the reasons the romance has been set aside so often. To use such an abundance of creatures to represent Fulk Fitz Waryn’s different predicaments and behaviors seems to point to a lack of art, a lack



of a unified vision on the part of the poet, and it makes it very difficult to interpret Fulk Fitz Waryn's actions.

But if we read the story of Fulk Fitz Waryn through the lens of the medieval bestial outlaw tradition, this shifting, protean animality makes more sense. Instead of showing a lack of poetic art on the part of the author, Fulk Fitz Waryn's disturbing animalistic performances can be found to vary significantly depending on the environmental context of the action, on Fulk Fitz Waryn's function within the narrative, and on the various traditional influences acting upon this hybrid 'monster' of a romance. This chapter undertakes to show the ways in which Fulk Fitz Waryn is an important part of the tradition of the English bestial outlaw. The notion of a deep ownership of a landscape, of inherited animality, and monstrous outlawry bind its seemingly disparate narrative elements together. And more importantly, the ambivalent and problematic combination of political and natural narrative results again in a complex work of literature which resists ultimate meaning-giving. Again, this is a narrative of rich contradiction and paradox, and an important part of the bestial outlaw tradition.

### ***Textual Traditions***

*Fouke le Fitz Waryn* is an Anglo-Norman prose romance which, like the *Gesta Herewardi*, preserves a somewhat distorted historical record of resistance to centralized rule in the century following the Conquest. But in this case, the resistance is of a decidedly privileged nature: Fouke is a Norman baron who resists King John's

attempts to seize his land in revenge for a childhood slight, among other things. The romance shares many specific motifs with the Hereward saga before it and the Greenwood material after it, and has as a consequence been of interest to those who trace the specific folkloric and historical lineage of the Robin Hood material. Some of these common motifs are the disguised hunter, the truth game centered on the measuring of cloth, and the rescue of a captured ally through trickery. And *FFW* thus forms an important link in the long chain of English outlawry. Although the romance survives only in a 16<sup>th</sup> century summary of a Middle English poem and in a prose summary of a rhyming Anglo-Norman version in a manuscript compiled c. 1325-50, linguistic evidence provided by the embedded fragments of the verse romance upon which it was based suggest that the OF romance was originally composed in the late thirteenth century.<sup>284</sup> It is one of a bevy of ancestral romances popular from 1100-1300, most of which feature in some way an unjustly exiled hero.<sup>285</sup>

There has not been much literary scholarship devoted to the romance of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*. Early criticism – and relatively recent criticism, to some extent – focused on how flawed the romance is in both in a literary sense and in a historical

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<sup>284</sup> The MS is British Library, Royal 12 C. XII, folios 33-61. See E.J. Hathaway et al., eds. *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, Anglo-Norman Text Society (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), xix-xx, for a summary of the available evidence.

<sup>285</sup> Other examples of this popular genre include *Guillaume d'Angleterre*, *Waldef*, *Boeve de Haumtone*, *Fergus*, and *Gui de Warewic*. For an analysis of the generic conventions of these romances, see M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 139-75.

one. Janet Meisel sums this up succinctly when she says that *FFW* was “condemned for its lack of literary merit as well as its gross historical inaccuracies.”<sup>286</sup> After this initial disparagement of the romance’s aesthetic problems, most critics go on to separate fact from fiction. Painter says characteristically that *FFW* is “a weird mixture of accurate information, plausible stories that lack confirmation, and magnificent flights of pure imagination.”<sup>287</sup> As with most of the other outlaw texts in the English corpus, much energy has been spent trying to find factual records in a sea of fiction – especially since both Hereward and Fulk Fitz Waryn are historically attested figures. In spite of their existing in a great number of historical documents, their stories both veer toward popular romance rather than sober chronicle. As Painter says, Fulk Fitz Waryn was the subject of a great many stories “current in his native district, Shropshire,” many of which were probably compiled into the romance, which is in turn a comprehensive summary of local legends documenting a character who was likely ‘a popular romantic figure’ by latter half of the 13th Century.<sup>288</sup>

Common in criticism is the notion of the inferior nature of the insular Anglo-Norman romances in comparison with their sophisticated cousins across the Channel. Susan Crane’s useful and perceptive treatment of insular romance

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<sup>286</sup> Janet Meisel, *Barons of the Welsh Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 133. From now on, in this chapter we will refer to the Anglo-Norman romance as *FFW* in order to distinguish it from the name of the protagonist.

<sup>287</sup> Sidney Painter, “The Sources of Fouke Fitz Warin,” *MLA* 50 (1935): 13.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

mentions *FFW* often within the context of the other romances, but offers no in-depth analysis of the story's themes. Finally, critics note the romance's unusual, often idiosyncratic images and motifs. Several folklorists have brought up various mythic aspects of *FFW*, but they do so in a rather unfocused way. Brian Levy says, "Cette histoire déjà déformée de Fouke III devient une fiction proprement dite par l'introduction de plusieurs éléments puisés dans le domaine littéraire et folklorique du 'hors-la-loi pseudo-historique.'" <sup>289</sup> The aspects of the narrative that place *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* firmly in the domain of the 'pseudo-historic outlaw' are exactly those which this study will examine, in more depth than has been previously attempted. Brian Levy has made a valiant attempt to rehabilitate the romance, arguing that it is artfully put together, that it is unified by tone, style and the thematic interest in *dreit heritage* throughout the entire narrative. <sup>290</sup> He shows that it is a relatively well-crafted work of art bookended by a mythic structure which unifies the plot, even if some parts are fantastic and others more historical. About Fulk Fitz Waryn's adventures into mythic lands of dragons and princesses, seen by many critics as unsuccessful digressions from the central story, Levy says: "La structuration de ces digressions merveilleuses est elle-même bien équilibrée." <sup>291</sup> I agree with this

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<sup>289</sup> Levy, Brian J. 'Fouke le fitz Waryn: de l'historicité incertaine aux valeurs plus littéraires d'un roman lignager anglo-normand', in *Histoire et Littérature au Moyen Age: actes du colloque du Centre d'Etudes Médiévales de l'Université de Picardie (Amiens 20-24 mars 1985)*, ed. Danielle Buschinger (Göppingen: Kümmerle), 254.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

evaluation, and I hope to add to this productive exploration of the literary merits of this romance by showing how the tradition of the bestial outlaw helps sharpen the romance's focus on issues of land, wilderness, and power. Crane, Meisel, and Levy have all seen the theme of inheritance and rightful ownership of the land to be an important aspect of this romance—I will push this a little farther, arguing that the land—the specific territory of the Shropshire marches—is actually the protagonist of the tale, and that Fulk fitz Waryn and his bestial family function as a lens through which to see this land more clearly and intensely.

This is originally an Anglo-Norman legend, presumably narrated, and certainly written down in Old French. But it bears many aspects in common with a populist tradition of English outlaw narrative, and in fact, the 18<sup>th</sup> C. antiquarian John Leland preserved an abbreviated version of a now-lost alliterative Middle English verse romance about Fulk Fitz Waryn in his *Collectanea*. In their introduction to Thomas Kelly's translation of Fouke le Fitz Waryn, Knight and Ohlgren note that previous Robin Hood scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge the deep connections between the later English outlaw material and the French outlaw tradition. I cite them in full here:

Previous critics have been reluctant to assert a direct connection between the French outlaw genre and the later English Robin Hood. While Maurice Keen admits that some of the episodes are "almost identical" and "substantially the same," he is largely quiet about the "French connection." J. C. Holt also comments upon the shared themes, but, like Keen, he largely dismisses any direct linkage because the Robin Hood tradition lacks an emphasis on the restitution of inheritance which "plays a fundamental role" in Hereward, Eustace, and Fouke. He asserts that "there is nothing of

this in Robin Hood," who "moves in a different world from that of the dispossessed feudal landowner" (p. 65). While the assertion may hold true for the early cycle of tales, it applies neither to Gamelyn, the earliest outlaw tale in Middle English, nor to the later Tudor Robert Hood, the disinherited and dispossessed Earl of Huntington. By stressing the differences, rather than the similarities – some strikingly close – both Keen and Holt have fostered the illusion of a native English outlaw tradition immune from outside influences.<sup>292</sup>

One wonders how the British outlaw tradition could have managed to stay insulated from other literatures being produced in the same time and place as the English outlaw material. It seems stranger to imagine that such English outlaw tales as Gamelyn and Robin Hood were not influenced by, or in active dialogue with, these Anglo-Norman ancestral romances. The large number of English romances extant in both Old French and Middle English should testify to the constant exchange of ideas and stories across linguistic divides. Just as it is counterproductive to imagine that the legend of Hereward was not influenced by Norse as well as Norman literary conventions, so it seems ill-advised to argue that the English outlaw tradition was created in an English-speaking vacuum. In reality, the later Middle English Greenwood poems and the Anglo-Norman ancestral romances share too many specific motifs, character types, and storylines for us to ignore their connectedness, and, indeed, it is freeing and useful to acknowledge the debts of influence on both sides of the linguistic fence.

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<sup>292</sup> Knight and Ohlgren and Kelly, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 690.

I believe it significant that *FFW*, like the other surviving Anglo-Norman ancestral romances, was translated into Middle English. Although translation does not necessarily mean that rarified and elite content is being made available to a lower caste of society, as has been previously suggested, it certainly means that the horizon of receptive audiences was significantly broadened. People were interested in hearing this tale of one elite family's struggles and successes, and they were interested in it at least in part because it boasted such a thrilling incarnation of the bestial outlaw.

In many ways, these Anglo-Norman ancestral romances most resemble specimens of the Old French genre of the *gestes de revolt*, in which a disgruntled vassal engaged in conflict with his king or peers, and often was outlawed for his rebellion, and some of the basic structures and themes of the Ancestral Romances are borrowed from these *gestes de revolt*. Crane cautions us that where the French *gestes de revolt* usually present a complex, ambivalent vision of society, in which conflict can often be meaningless or pointless, and which generally spiral into chaos and destruction, the English Ancestral romance reifies social and political structures, and any rebellion or exile results in the ultimate restitution, reinstatement, or renewal of a specific family's position.<sup>293</sup> Where Crane sees reification, I find quite a bit of ambivalence and chaos, but I agree that the English ancestral romance is

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<sup>293</sup> Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 13.

deeply concerned with questions of humans' relationship with the land – and the idea of coming to a state of balance or control within it. I would argue further that the ancestral romances dealing with a hero's exile from his lands are also influenced by the structural framework of the English bestial outlaw tradition, and this contributes, in many ways, to its difference from the continental *geste de revolt*. In his study *Forests: the Shadow of Civilization*, Robert Pogue Harrison declares that the "British outlaw is anything but revolutionary in his ideology," because the outlaw's forests and wild spaces "represent an *inverted* world," not a place with meaning in and of itself.<sup>294</sup> Because the outlaws represent an inversion of the law, and because ultimately "almost all the medieval outlaw stories possess a happy ending that reveals to what extent they in fact reaffirm the founding priorities of the social order," they are not subversive arguments in favor of wildness as some alternative to civilization.<sup>295</sup> Although this is an interesting point, and one worth considering, I believe that although there may be ultimate reconciliation scenes in the outlaw romances, as we see in *FFW*, they are generally uneasy resolutions. Fulk may move back into his ancestral lands and sire generations of landed descendants, but he still seems to suffer some sense of loss. Likewise, although Hereward is accepted successfully back into William's fold at the end of the *GH*, he is betrayed, ambushed, and destroyed by old enemies with long memories in Gaimar's account.

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<sup>294</sup> Harrison, *Forests, the Shadow of Civilization*, 77, 80.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.



Robin Hood may be admitted into King Edward's court in the *GRH*, but he suffers such homesickness for the woods that he must defect for his natural habitat, in the process becoming an outlaw yet again. And as this dissertation has argued, many of the landscapes depicted in outlaw narratives are anything but simply mirror images of civilization. Instead, they are specific places with their own character and distinct ecology. And they are, above all else, ambivalent about almost everything.

With all of this in mind, this study approaches *FFW* as a work of fiction, acknowledging that it is, as described by Janet Meisel, "a peculiar combination of fantasy, error, and fact" a "strange combination of the commonplace and the bizarre," but that for this study's purposes, it is an intriguing work of fiction, full of interesting outlaw lore.<sup>296</sup> Fulk, like Hereward, was a historical figure, but that is not the central concern of this study, which instead focuses on the elements of Fulk's story that tie in with the English outlaw tradition. Finally, much has been made of the specifically law-focused nature of Middle English romance when seen in contrast to continental romances (and outlaw ballads, too, are overwhelmingly seen as quite focused on legal aspects of the human conflict.<sup>297</sup>) This is true, English medieval literature is very aware of legal procedure and process, but we must train our

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<sup>296</sup> Meisel, *Barons of the Welsh Frontier*, 134.

<sup>297</sup> For the legal aspects of this fiction, see Crane's *Insular Romance*, as well as Keith Kelly's dissertation, "The outlaw versus the lawyer: The role of the medieval outlaw hero as champion of justice in the face of rising legal literacy," Saint Louis University, 2006.

awareness on the other side of this fixation — chaos and outlawry is the balance of this legal order, and it plays an equally important part in this literature.

So now, let us plunge into a new reading of this work, focusing on the elements of the narrative that tell us something about the landscape of outlawry in the Welsh Marches.

### *Heraldic Beasts and Outlaws*

The entire narrative of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* is bookended by two poems written in the tradition of the *Prophecies of Merlin*. They are preserved in verse form by the redactor, who seems to see them as significant keys to understanding the action of the romance. The coded prophecy — delivered in a possessed' giant's last words — describes Fulk Fitz Waryn as a wolf, and his nemesis, King John, as a leopard. It is significant that the first references made to the primary players in this story are made in a coded language of heraldry and prophecy. Beyond providing at the beginning and end of the story some exciting heraldic play along similar lines to that found in the texts dealing with Suffolk's rebellion, this prophecy situates the romance's action specifically within the realm of the bestial, and within the natural world.

The poetic and prophetic references to the wolf and the leopard are meant to be projected into the action of the romance. The wolf, beyond being Fulk fitz Waryn's heraldic animal, would also make poetic sense to an audience who knew of

Fulk's status as an outlaw. Interesting also are the references to his enemies, John the leopard and Morys of Powys the boar:

E de ta maunche issera  
Ly loup qa merveilles fra,  
Q'avera les dentz aguz,  
E de tous serra conuz,  
E serra si fort e fer  
Qu'il enchacera le sengler  
Hors de la Blaunche Launde;  
Taut avera vertue graunde.  
Ly leopard le loup sywera,  
E de la cowe le manacera.<sup>298</sup>

An unhappy blend of native and alien animals engaged in a never-ending surreal conflict is a result of the focused heraldic context of this poem. But, strangely enough, these awkward heraldic personifications work within the political context of this romance. The leopard is a creature of evil, a dissembler. Where his deep attachment to his land has turned Fulk Fitz Waryn into a savage, yet native creature, John the leopard remains foreign, out of place in his own country. The description of the wolf's teeth seems sort of grotesque and gratuitous, but it is a common depiction of lupine characteristics, and further associates him with unbridled appetite, rapaciousness, and demonic fierceness, something which has seemed inappropriate to many readers of this romance, but which makes perfect sense when read in the

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<sup>298</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 6:19-28.

context of bestial outlawry.<sup>299</sup> This wolf with sharp teeth will chase the boar from the western lands, and then the leopard will chase the wolf across the entire landscape of England. This is an odd hunt which begins in a specific place, the “Blaunche Launde” and expands outwards to cover all of England and beyond. In the prophecy the Blaunche Launde almost reads as a heraldic field upon which mascots come to life and perform in a surreal battle the heraldic/cartographic encapsulation of the narrative’s action:

Ly loup lerra boys e montz,  
 En ewe meindra ou peschons,  
 E tresnoera la mer ;  
 Environera cet ydle enter.  
 Au dreyn veyndra le leopart  
 Par Bon engyn e par son art.  
 Pus en ceste lande vendra;  
 En ewe son recet tendra.<sup>300</sup>

A wolf defending the Blaunche Launde in strife and war, Fulk is bestial of necessity. He must become more like an animal to defend his property against the other heraldic animals of the other players in this drama. But the ‘loup’ becomes even more unusual as it is pushed by the ‘leopard’ out of his land. As a consequence, he must leave his natural habitat and become a seawolf who harries the intruder from without. As we can see, the tradition of heraldry, a rich and varied source of

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<sup>299</sup> On the iconography of the wolf’s mouth, see G.D. Schmidt, *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-century Britain to the Fifteenth Century* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1995); and Aleksander G. Pluskowski, “Apocalyptic monsters: animal inspirations for the iconography of medieval north European devourers,” in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. R. Mills and B. Bildhauer (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 155-176.

<sup>300</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 6:29-36.

medieval animal imagery has helped frame the story of Fulk's outlawry in a powerful, if unsettling way.

This strange heraldic passage is but one of the many introductory frames that are constructed around the central narrative of Fulk's outlawry. The author includes many different kinds of orienting frameworks for the tale, including landscape description and an extensive history lesson. First we will look at initial paragraph of the romance, which provide some important information about the location of the story.

### *The Landscape*

The first lines of the prose romance of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* open with what appears to be a sort of generic joke. The set-piece description of the greenwood in late spring- or early summertime is common to both dream vision and greenwood tales, which are, in many ways, related genres.<sup>301</sup> We know that the narrative which follows is an outlaw romance, so this must lean more towards greenwood romance than dream vision. Yet the conventionally lively description of the springtime of the year ends with an unconventional outward move – the author connects the springtime scene with thoughts of ancestors:

En le temps de averyl e may, quant les prees e les herbes reverdissent,  
et chescune chose vivaunte recovre vertue, beauté, e force, les mountz

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<sup>301</sup> See for example *The Parliament of the Three Ages*, a dream vision which opens with a poaching scene.

e les valey[e]s retentissent des douce chauntz des oseylouns, e les cuers de chescune gent pur la beauté du temps e la sesone, mountent en haut e s'enjolyvent, donqe deit home remenbrer des aventures e pruesses nos auncestres qe se penerent pur honour en leauté quere, e de teles choses parler qe a plusours purra valer.<sup>302</sup>

Crane reads this unironically, as a straightforward exposition of the author's intent to provide a satisfactory ancestral romance which makes the deeds of the great Fitz Waryn family known. But beyond that, this set-piece orients the listener, allowing him to prepare himself for a tale about fresh air and trickery. Such an opening could just be signaling a pastoral narrative, or a spring-love romance. But by the time this romance is composed, this kind of opening more likely would have signified "Greenwood Romance."

And, as usual for an outlaw romance, the move is toward the specific, away from the generic landscape. The description of verdant things and fertility is but a prologue to more specific thought of one family's generations. And certainly, the preoccupation in this text with lineage and land is noticeable, and doubtless the author does want to emphasize this important aspect of his narrative. Birds, flowers, and sun are all common tropes to both the Greenwood and the more mainstream romances, but the mention of the mountains seems out of place, or rather, too placed. This is not some *locus amoenus*, which tend to be flat and devoid of

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<sup>302</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 1:1-8.

topographical disparity, but a specific landscape – the borderlands of Wales, up against some tall mountains.

The land on the marches of Wales has been the stage for many conflicts, and the author of the romance seems deeply aware of this reality, for he emphasizes the specialness of the land and genders it as feminine, as a place to be tamed, fertilized and owned. His knowledge of the topography is extensive and technically accurate. Wright, a Marcher himself, noted in his edition of the romance that the author “displays an extraordinarily minute knowledge of the topography of the borders of Wales, and more especially of Ludlow and its immediate neighborhood. Whatever historical mistakes he may have made, he never falls into an error with regard to localities, and his descriptions are so exact that we never fail to recognize the spot he describes.”<sup>303</sup> Wright’s comments point to an important detail: the author’s care in providing accurate descriptions of the landscape but not in assuring a historically accurate chronology of historical events suggests that his focus is not on people, but the land. As Wright notes, “his is no impressionistic geographical scheme of generic ‘manor,’ ‘forest,’ and ‘mountain’; the locations he names can largely be discovered where he said them to be,” and forests don’t go walkabout, as they are prone to do in the later, less geographically careful, outlaw ballads.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Thomas Wright, ed., *The History of Fulk Fitz Warine* (London: The Warton Club, 1856), xv.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

The issue of land, so central in the ancestral romances, was equally important in the English political system. Land ownership played an important part in the life of a vassal, since the governance and administration of the land was quickly replacing warfare as the central occupation of a landowner in the increasingly system-centered England of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>305</sup> Thus we can see part of the impetus for the exceptional fixation upon the hero's place within his landscape, since the two are fundamentally equated beyond even military action or service to a king. The ancestral hero *was* his land, more than he was a representation of his country's military power, his king, or even his own self. From the windswept and desolate beaches of *King Horn*, to the mysterious Fens in *Hereward*, to the teeming, dreamlike seascapes of *Havelock*, to the many fecund forests of Fouke le Fitz Waryn, the real landscape was becoming a central player in the story, a protagonist almost as much as the hero himself. I believe it to be deeply significant that the kinds of landscapes which figure in the outlaw romances often are much more specific and accurate in terms of location. They are important politically.

This political reality could not be underscored more clearly than by taking a quick look at Shropshire lands. They are rolling, visibly verdant and fruitful farmland, standing against a bleak and beautiful wall of Welsh mountains.<sup>306</sup> The

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<sup>305</sup> On this, see Crane, *Insular Romance*, 23.

<sup>306</sup> See Rowley, *The Welsh Border: Archaeology, History, and Landscape* (Charleston, SC: Tempus Publishing, 1986), 90-91, for an analysis of the Welsh Marches' political and geographical importance.



contrast is great and affecting, and one comes to understand that this really was seen as the end of England and the gatekeeper of safety from the wildness to the west, which was so obviously full of wild and malign entities – both human and animal, which must not be allowed into England’s green and pleasant land. In the southern regions of Shropshire, the mountains extend past the border into England, but in Fulk fitz Waryn’s neighborhood, English manor land is right across the border from the Welsh mountains.<sup>307</sup> It is a dramatic difference, and it explains the apparent intrusion of the mountains in the romance’s opening lines.

That the land upon which Fulk fitz Waryn’s all-important property sits is situated within the borders of modern-day (and medieval) Shropshire, is significant, since it places the Fitz Waryns in a very critical position with regards to the ever present threat of the Welsh in the mountains directly to the west. This physical position as the last strongholds warding off a ‘barbarian’ kingdom is of course the key to understanding the Fitz Waryns and other Marcher families’ key political position as the most powerful and independent – as well as some of the richest barons in England – they received special royal attention and compensation largely because their responsibilities were great, and because their defection to the other side could spell ruin for English interests and boundaries.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> See Meisel, *Barons of the Welsh Frontier*, 104.

<sup>308</sup> See Jones, *Insular Romance*, 23.

The great lord is nothing off his land — he is as good as a hunted beast, no more, and the savagery he must resort to in order to recapture his meaning-giving property only amplifies this equation. But paradoxically, like other outlaw heroes, Fulk's true habitat appears to be the wilderness. Although this romance's conflict centers on the ownership of ancestral lands, Fulk fitz Waryn keeps returning to wild landscapes as if compelled, and when he visits foreign lands, his name is Amys del Bois. His identification with woodland is so strong that when he gets married, his friends tease him, asking him whether he would take his new wife to his natural habitat, the woods, or to the more humanly appropriate hall.<sup>309</sup> Implicit in their teasing is the real question: where is the correct place for the great life events of such a creature of the woods like Fulk? In a jousting episode early on in the romance, Waryn takes refuge in forest and is recognized by no one; although it is a common romance motif to present a hero who wishes to preserve his anonymity and thus stays in the forest to avoid recognition, here, it is meant to foreshadow Fulk fitz Waryn's eventual exile — the entire family is allied with the natural landscape, not with cities, or even manors.<sup>310</sup> Thus, we can conclude that the land, contrary to general critical opinion, is more than just a political pawn in the vast chess game being played between king and baron — it is the essence of the hero, and thus his

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<sup>309</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 156.

<sup>310</sup> C.f. Chretien de Troyes' *Perceval* for several instances of the motif of the hero waiting in the woods in order to avoid recognition before a tournament.

outlawry from his land and subsequent dehumanization is part of a logical, and arguably generic, process specific to this insular genre.

If the romance hero's relation to the world "is typically one of domination," the outlawed hero is dominated by the world, and in eventually overcoming this hostile larger world and recovering his central place in his smaller world, he becomes, in a way, the very world he conquered.<sup>311</sup> In other words, the young Fulk fitz Waryn begins his life as an equation of his own land, lineage, and family future. When he is outlawed he is still those secure elements, but awash in a sea of meaninglessness, and it is only by conquering all the monsters in that uncomfortable wide world that he can assume those foreign qualities into himself and bring them back to his lands, his heritage, after having aggrandized that whole project through his self purging exile and self-reaffirming reinstitution.<sup>312</sup>

### *Fulk and the Brut*

Before focusing on the tale of the generations of leaders who will occupy this borderland, the romance introduces the region with painstaking care in a final framing introduction. This historical introduction contextualizes the Fitz Waryn family's ownership of the land within the long span of British history. The redactor describes William the Conqueror's reconquest of the land and its subsequent

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<sup>311</sup> On the ancestral hero's dominant relation to his world, see Crane, *Insular Romance*, 80.

<sup>312</sup> On the importance of his land to a baron, see Meisel, *Barons of the Welsh Frontier*, 56-59.

contestation as a way of setting the scene for the Fitz Waryns' family drama, but then the narrative swings wide, and we learn about the first conquest of the land by Brutus and his sidekick Corineus.

The romance as we know it opens the action by describing William the Conqueror's activities after the Battle of Hastings: "Willam Bastard, duc de Normaundie, vynt ou grant gent e pueple santz nounbre en Engleterre e conquist a force tote la terre, e ocist le roy Heraud, e se fist coroner a Loundres, e si estably pees e leys a sa volenté, e dona terres a diverse gentz qe ou ly vyndrent."<sup>313</sup> Already, the land is a focus, mentioned as many times as people are in this passage. William, who takes all of the land by force, is figured as a strong, masculine conqueror, in neither positive nor negative terms, but as a giver and a taker away of life and land. The narrative continues, painting a clear picture of the kind of impact this period of political upheaval has on the landscape: "En ycel temps Yweyn Goynez fust prince de Gales, e si fust vailaunt e bon guerreour, e le roy le dota mout le plus. Cesty Yweyn out guasté tote la marche, e tote fust voyde de Cestre tanqe al mont Gylebert."<sup>314</sup> In his initial orienting description of the Welsh marches, the author locates the unique border landscape in the political context of the period, in the conflict between the Welsh and the English. In this move, the narrative focus shifts from general to regional history, and from a general to a regional landscape.

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<sup>313</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 3:9-14.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid*, 1:14-17.

The author has painted a picture of a barren wasteland, which, as a borderland between two countries, is a victim of the violence of human conflict. A historical place of great contestation, it has become a waste, made useless – what, in modern terms, we have come to call a no-man’s-land. It is now empty of meaning, ready to be conquered and tamed. It is in need of dominance by some strong [masculine] political figure who can stabilize its emptiness and fill it with human meaning again. Its very name, the ‘Blaunche Launde,’ feminizes it, and, using the language of love and beauty, almost anthropomorphizes it as a beautiful, white, feminine emptiness which is somewhat monstrous in its lack of human meaning.<sup>315</sup> Luckily, “le roy fust mout sages, e pensa qu’il dorreit les terres de la marche as plus vaylauntz chevalers de tut le ost, pur ce qu’il devereint defendre la marche de le prince a lur profit e al honour lur seignur le roy.”<sup>316</sup> Wise William the builder knows what the land needs – a good strong man to possess it, defend it, and give its existence meaning. In order to become useful, it needs to become part of the economics of ownership and fertility, to work for the profit of the king and other major political players. So William allows his best and brightest (or perhaps the most energetic and unruly) to settle on it, the men who will become the powerful Marcher Lords. In some ways, this lines up with the actual history of the Marches: “Following a rebellion by Welsh princes in alliance with a Highlands thegn known as Eadric the Wild, King William

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<sup>315</sup> The name is feminine not only due to the noun’s gender, but also through its whiteness and its continual need for succor.

<sup>316</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 1:22-26.

devised a scheme by which the marches were administered as semi-autonomous earldoms," run by powerful lords who could otherwise have jostled with William for power.<sup>317</sup>

Thus begins a period of imperial claiming, naming, and building on this wilderness, but not without a few difficulties. The first men William selects are too weak to control the entropy, apparently; many prove lacking in the innate qualities necessary to survive in and defend this unusually resistant landscape. One man began building a series of castles and other works but 'yl ne les parfist poynt'; he is too weak, too passive in his natural energies, to perform his duty.<sup>318</sup> Thus, he is replaced by a pair of 'wicked' sons, strongmen who have the force and tenacity to respond to land's exigencies, but again the balance is off, and they manage to complete what seems a problematic building project in the Marches, only to turn against William's rule:

Ceux furent gentz trop demesurees e trop culvers, e grantment  
mespristrent countre lur seignour, le roy Henri, fitz Willam Bastard,  
frere roy Willam le Rous; e parfurent le chastel de Brugge contre la  
defense le roy Henri, dont le roy Henri les desheryta e fist exiler pur  
tous jours, et dona lur terres as ces chevalers.<sup>319</sup>

It seems the very location of this land has the power to influence and corrupt those with the strength to tame it; it gets rid of the weak and makes outlaws of the strong.

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<sup>317</sup> Rowley, *The Welsh Border*, 91.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, 3-4:34-5.

Finally, Joce de Dynan, a man with the necessary qualities, manages to tame it completely:

Cesti Joce fist fere desouth la ville de Dynan un pount de pere e chaus  
oultre la ryvere de Temede, en le haut chemyn qe va parmy la marche,  
e de Cestre desqe Brustut. Joce fist son chastiel de Dynan de tres  
baylles e le envyrone de double fossee, une dedens e une dehors.<sup>320</sup>

Thus the land is tamed with human buildings and most importantly, a strong masculine hand. It becomes ‘mapable’ with human-made landmarks which mark it as a useful place. The addition of bridges, keeps and moats – classically Norman markers of space – provide us a record of a markedly changing landscape. Again, this lines up with the broad contours of history. As Trevor Rowley remarks, “it is difficult to overestimate the impact of the Normans on the Welsh Border landscape.”

The difficult political reality of the region sent the Norman castle-construction machine into overdrive, and the landscape became literally studded with new defenses; “in the whole of England and Wales by far the densest concentration of earth and timber castles was in the Marches.”<sup>321</sup>

But one space in particular resists control. On a visit to survey the marches, William the Conqueror notices a ruin:

Le roy Willam Bastard aprocha les mountz e les vals de Gales, si vist  
une ville mout large, close jadys de hautz murs, qe tote fust arse e  
gastee, e par desouth la ville en une pleyne fist tendre ces pavylons, e  
il demorreit, ce dit, cele nuyt. Lors enquist le roy de un Bretoun

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid, 4:12-16.

<sup>321</sup> Rowley, 95.

coment la ville avoit a noun, e coment fust ensi gasté. 'Sire,' fet le  
Bretoun, 'je vous dirroy. Le chastiel fust jadys apellee chastiel Bran,  
mes ore est apelee la Vele Marche.'<sup>322</sup>

The setting of this ruined place is near the 'mountains and valleys of Wales' in a deliberate echo of the romance's opening passage – perhaps a further clue that the author has this specific place in mind when he composes the deceptively generic springtime opening passage. The ruined castle, a waste apparently without a name or human inhabitants, is an evocative symbol of the failure of civilization and the victory of nature – one need only read the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Ruin* for a reminder of how very powerfully moving and disturbing it can be to contemplate such a previously humanized space for any length of time. This is a place where the (ruined) castle/town is specifically mentioned as the major feature of the landscape, even though it's been overcome, an uneasy compromise between wildness and entropy, and a certain leaning towards safeness, characteristic of outlaw narrative in general.<sup>323</sup>

William seems disturbed by the strange place and sets up his tents to remain over night – preparing to attempt yet another conquest and naming of land, like some medieval Lewis and Clark bedding down in yet another strange locale. The uncanny ruin has a human history, it appears – it once had a human name, Castle

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 4:17-24.

<sup>323</sup> On this phenomenon, See H.E. Gumbrecht's first chapter on medieval ruins of various sorts, "Identifying Fragments," in *The Powers of Philology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 9-23.



Bran, but it is now only known by its status as a wasteland and a borderland: “La Vele Marche.” And thus the narrative, which has to this point been telling a linear tale of the Norman Conquest of the Welsh marches (in this narrative, it is more of a ‘re-discovery’) veers away from the recent centuries’ events to focus on the distant colonial past of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britannie*.

The author of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* uses the *Brut* tradition to further contextualize his region and its hero; this is a very interesting authorial decision, leading us in many different interpretive directions. In terms of literary history, it is interesting since it shows how local ancestral lore is drawn toward the massively influential mythic history like iron filings to a magnet, documenting the incredible reach and influence of this great story. The author of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* chooses to use the *Brut* tradition to give the all-important land owned by the Fitz Waryns a mythically significant historical background. Land figures prominently in this story, being the object of the contest between King John and Fouke le Fitz Waryn. From an ecocritical perspective, it tells us in what context the author viewed land and exile—within the world of the *Brut*, land is arguably a living thing that regenerates only to destroy and be destroyed, and exile is at times a heroic state of the greatest honor, and at others a shameful, bestial humiliation. The *FFW* author’s incorporation of the *Brut* tradition into his narrative gives this small family saga reach and significance far beyond Shropshire, and places Fouke le Fitz Waryn within the gallery of

exceptional men like Brutus, Arthur, Corineus, and William the Conqueror, as Timothy Jones has so carefully shown.<sup>324</sup> It also places him in a unique relationship to the land, as a meaning-giver; he becomes part of the national story of land conquest, violence, and exile, one in a long chain of repeating histories.

The history of Britain as set forth in Geoffrey of Monmouth and then embellished by the likes of Wace and Layamon tells on one level a story of perpetual marginalization and outlawry. Brutus, the original founder of the island's human population, is an exile, and he in turn pushes other beings into exile – and even out of this world entirely. His own people are in turn pushed into the margins, exiled by subsequent colonizing invasions. As the foundational narrative of the period – the most popular, as well as the most far-reaching – this has significant consequences in terms of influence on stories like this one. The notion of animality, marginalization, and even outright outlawry become, even more than before, part of the basic fabric of national storytelling. The *FFW* author's use of the *Brut* gives us an idea of the ways in which outlawry was seen to be the natural order of things, one of the main repeating dramas being played out during important moments of national conquest and colonization, along with the extinction of ancient peoples and monsters, and changes of political guard in a sort of national life cycle or political ecosystem. The author seems to integrate parts of the *Brut* narrative in order to stabilize the

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<sup>324</sup> See Timothy Jones, "'Fouke le Fitz Waryn,' and National Mythology," *Studies in Philology* 91, no. 3 (1994): 233-249.

outlawry of the protagonist; being exiled, within the greater perspective of the *Brut*, is simply something that can happen to great heroes from time to time. But within the *Brut* lurk other, more disturbing strands of outlaw lore which make this reifying move problematic, as we will see.

The uncanny ruined city has a history – one which is directly relevant to the bestial narrative of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*. The territory was held by natives, but not human ones, as Geoffrey of Monmouth had shown in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Instead, “nul n'y habita ces parties, estre tre[s] lede gentz, grantz geans, dount lur roy fust apelee Geomagog.”<sup>325</sup> The giants are hideous and useless, created only to be destroyed. Although they are not human they mime human social structures; they have a king, after all. But this does not redeem them, as their ugliness and monstrosity makes them objects of brief wonder and then summary destruction. And who better to dispose of monsters than the great bestial hero, Corineus, who is himself rather monstrous. The protocolonial history of Geoffrey of Monmouth has become, if possible, more colonial than ever. The author's emphasis on the stark wasteland inhabited by the giants, on their ugliness, not their size, casts them in the role of the savage, inhuman native. But Corineus is fierce as well, and his role as a giant-killer is emphasized in this retelling of the story. In the typology of the romance, he stands for the first in a great line of marginal monster-killer/outlaw

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid. 4:27-28.

figures. For example, Corineus becomes quite angry after he is wounded by Geomagog, the king of the Giants, while fighting to survive. The author tells us that “Coryneus se corocha” in an intense physical reaction arguably associated with epic (and bestial) heroism. Drawing upon this intense rage, Corineus kills the giant with a superhuman surge of strength and then throws his body onto the rocks below, where, in the *HRB*, the destroyed bodies of all the giants remained.

The author of *FFW* adds a narrative which weaves the bloody aftermath of the legendary monster-killing of Brutus’ second-in-command, Corineus, into the local history of the ‘Blaunche Launde.’ In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s telling, as well as in the subsequent *Brut* tradition, the episode ends with the final killing of the land’s previous humanoid inhabitants. But not in this romance. Here, something even more monstrous and spectacular happens:

Un esprit del deble meyntenant entra le cors Geomagog e vynt en ces parties, e defendy le pays longement, qe unqe Bretonn n'osa habiter. E longement après, le roy Bran fitz Donwal fist refere la cité, redresser les murs, e afermer les grantz fosses, e fesoit burgh e grant marché, e le deble vint de nuyt, e oost [a] quanqe leynz fust, e pus en sa unqe nul n'y habita.<sup>326</sup>

The native returns – this does not happen in other extant *Brut* narratives. The reanimated corpse of the giant Geomagog disturbingly haunts the new city occupied by King Bran, and causes the city to become abandoned yet again, since no Briton is daring enough to withstand the zombie’s attacks. This story is a fascinating version

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<sup>326</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 4-5:36-4.

of the Fisher King story intriguingly mixed with a sort of Beowulfian storyline, arguably a result of the fecund storytelling climate of the Post-Conquest period. The chilling ‘e le deble vint de nuyt’ certainly reminds one of *Beowulf*’s ‘cwom on wanre niht...’ passages, yet the great yet paralyzed king is no Hrothgar — he is the great king of Welsh and Arthurian legend, Bran.

So in this version of the *Brut*’s story of conquest, Brutus and Corineus make efforts which hold back the monstrous prehistory of Britain for a time, but ultimately, their conquest of this land is unsuccessful, as this reanimated creature lays waste all the efforts of man. Matters have stood in this way over the centuries, and thus, this land has lain a waste, and a waste is less than nothing. In the struggle between the bestial zombie who represents the old land, and civilized human, the monster wins. And the land lies unused, and useless, as long as it is inhabited by this creature guarding it. This is a vision of wilderness without purpose, land without a master — as worse than useless, as demonic, even. Opening the story of *FFW* with a narrative of the patron saint of monstrous British heroism, Corineus, is a stroke of genius, since it both sets the stage for the kind of behavior expected of a bestial hero. The strange spectral history connects a distant demonic past with a complicated present, and we realize now that a lineage of bestial monster-killers has been established.

William the Conqueror, here equated with the great Brutus, must visit this land and notice its fateful dissonance, its gloomy inhumanity a jarring blight on the fertile plains of Shropshire. He of course sets out to take back the land for

civilization: “Le roy s'enmervyla mont. Payn Peverel, le fier e hardy chevaler, cosyn le roy, ad tot escoté, e dit qu'il asayereit cele nuyt la merveille.”<sup>327</sup> Again, a hero is needed to rid this disturbing ruin of its demonic presence – and through this process, the land is finally opened up to human use. Payn Peverel, the king’s cousin, playing the Corineus to William the Conqueror’s Brutus, declares publicly that he will stay overnight in the haunted castle, in an action analogous to Beowulf and Celtic/Scandinavian haunted locale stories. Timothy Jones sees Payn Peverel’s fight with Geomagog as analogous to Christian hagiography, most specifically the stories of Saints Juliana and Margaret of Antioch, who vanquish dragons only after demanding answers of them.<sup>328</sup> But I think it is also important to view this fight with the zombie-like corpse of the long-dead Geomagog within the context of Northern ghost-lore. Parallels with Norse draugar lore are particularly clear, and they include the treasure seeking revenant, the display of the club by the avenging hero, and the vanquishing of the haunting by a monstrous monster-hunter, but of course there is nothing to connect them incontrovertibly.

In service of William the Conqueror, Peverel vanquishes the zombie, who, before dying, prophesizes the future of the land he had haunted, in the prophecy which we have already explored earlier on in this chapter.<sup>329</sup> He links his body and the memory of his haunting with the land’s future in his dying breath, and connects

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<sup>327</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 5:5-7.

<sup>328</sup> Jones, “‘Fouke le Fitz Waryn,’ and National Mythology,” 239-244.

<sup>329</sup> See Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 5. See also (Grimir, Fenrir and dying curses.)

his monstrous existence with that of the men who will claim the land after him. Then Payn Peverel displays the monster's club in triumph within the hall, and the club is maintained as a souvenir of this frontier confrontation for years.<sup>330</sup>

Geomagog is basically a reanimated corpse, which, like the Norse ones, guards a treasure and haunts a specific locality. Celtic lore, too, contains these reanimated corpses, for example in the second branch of the Mabinogion, where the cauldron of Bendigeidfran (Bran) reanimates dead corpses. It also establishes Fulk fitz Waryn's line as a family of monster-slayers who specialize in specifically haunted places with cannibalistic, humanoid creatures or dragons haunting them. As in the case of Hereward, there are several surprisingly similar elements in the story of Fulk fitz Waryn to the bear's son genre, as we shall see. Fulk is a difficult child who has problems with authority, as evidenced by his fist-fight with a young prince John. He kills dragons, destroys giants and displays their clubs in his hall once he's vanquished them. He travels to magical realms in search of treasure, and displays, as we shall see, many of the traits of the outlaw, or the beastly hero. And with the addition of this monster-slaying, we gain a complete portfolio.

And so ends the romance's significant detour into mythic history. We the audience now understand that the Blaunche Launde land is a special place, that it tends toward entropy, and that it requires a special kind of semi-monstrous hero to

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<sup>330</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 7.

keep it under human control. The romance becomes a deceptively straightforward-seeming civilizing narrative, a dialectic of waste and cultivation, which reminds one of the frontier narratives of early America. In his *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville famously observed that

Europeans think a lot about the wild, open spaces of America, but the Americans themselves hardly give them a thought. The wonders of inanimate nature leave them cold, and, one may almost say, they do not see the marvelous forests surrounding them until they begin to fall beneath the ax. What they see is something different. The American people see themselves marching through wildernesses, drying up marshes, diverting rivers, peopling the wilds, and subduing nature. It is not just occasionally that their imagination catches a glimpse of this magnificent vision. It is something which plays a real part in the least, as the most important, actions of every man, and it is always flitting before his mind.<sup>331</sup>

I would now argue that the narrative of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* captures a similar moment in English history, when the national myth similarly fixated upon the notion of drying up marshes, subduing forests, and building towers upon lofty crags. Arguably, the great poets of the post-conquest period – and here I charitably include the author of the lost poetic version of the *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* romance – saw themselves as the poets born to sanctify the soil. We see this quite clearly in the narrative of the Blaunche Land and its various owners – from giants to Brutus and Corineus, to the undead, to William the Conqueror, this land has been in need of sanctification, of meaning-making to rescue it from its pointless, demonic past. Brian

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<sup>331</sup> Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Jacob Peter Mayer (N.p.: Harper Collins, 2000), 485.



Jones argues that in their retelling of the giant myth, “their (the Normans’ *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*) myth replaces rather than augments the *Brut*.”<sup>332</sup> In other words, the *Fouke le fitz Waryn* romance offers a newer version of an effective national myth to show the ascendancy of Norman power and culture. This is a nuanced and powerful reading, but where Jones sees replacement, I detect reiteration, a repeating process which is not teleological but cyclic. William and his monster-fighting sidekick provide us with yet another reason to believe that the author of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* wanted this romance to be read as one of exile and restitution – in his clear framing of the story within the *Brut* myth, which is, as I have argued, fundamentally one of cyclic exile and restitution, he shows it to be part of that context, fundamentally, a repeating history within a land of repeated histories.

Payn Peverel may be the man to kill monsters, but as we have seen in other outlaw narratives, a figure who pushes too far into the realm of the monsters he fights often has trouble reentering the human world of fertility and inheritance. John Leland, in his summary of the alliterative ME version of the Fulk Fitz Waryn romance, says, “William Conqueror toke counsel of Corbet and Mortimer for strenkething of his marches aboute the quarters of Shropshire again the

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<sup>332</sup> Jones, “‘Fouke le Fitz Waryn,’ and National Mythology,” 237.

Walschmen,” and chose Peverel, the cleansing hero, as the first lord of the Marches.<sup>333</sup> But then Leland tells us, from the English poem, that

Payne Peverel had no issue. But his sister had a sunne, caullid William, a worthy knight, that wan the hundreds of Ellesmere and Melior, and other mo. This William in his enterprises was wonded so sore that no man beheight hym life; yet by eating of a sheelde of a wilde bore he got an appetite, and after recoverid. This William made thre chirches, as testifieth the book of the romance.<sup>334</sup>

Payn Peverel, “that lovid welle hunting” is predictably infertile, and thus hands over the land to the first ancestor of the Fitz Waryns; this lack of generative power, in the context of this poem, points to something wrong. He may be strong, but his Nimrod-esque obsession with the hunt shows that he is not the appropriate steward of the land. His violence has deprived him of his fertility. He needs, therefore, a successor who is wild, but not quite so wild as he.

Luckily, his heir William brims with life, to the point where it pushes him into bestial territory. He must consume a vast quantity of wild boar meat to be healed – and then he becomes prolific in offspring and in buildings. Lack of manly virtue is cured by an infusion of wilderness in the form of that side of meat.<sup>335</sup> And when Payne Peverel turns over his land to William, all the different kinds of

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<sup>333</sup> T. Hearne, ed., *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, 3rd ed., 6 vols. (London: Benjamin White, 1774), 1: 230.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>335</sup> C.f. the analogous healing of Cadwallader in Lagamon’s *Brut* – the king is unable to rule, but once fed the inner thigh muscle of his closest retainer, he regains his strength.

landscape are finally delineated – forest, wasteland, chase, and the countryside. It is worth spending some time on the French here:

Ly roy apela Payn Peverel, e ly dona la Blaunche Launde, e foreste,  
guastyne, chaces, e tut le pays. E si aveit une mote environnee de  
marreis e de ewe, e la fist Payn un tour bel e fort, e fust la mote apelee  
Wayburs, e si court une ryvere delees qe de Payn Peverel tint le noun,  
e si est apelee Peverel, mes pus fust apellee Pevereye.<sup>336</sup>

This castle is built in a very specific topography. The Norman builder gives the wilderness his name and sets structures on it, preparing to make it useful. The parts of the landscape are given their specific names – forest, waste, chases, etc. – to show how they are useful to the great baronial, civilizing, human interests. These buildings, and the tamed topographical features upon which they rest, are duly named. Thus the feminized Blaunche Launde is masculinized, or neutralized, by the great phallic Norman tower which comes to dominate its horizon.

As we can see from the above passage, the land is something of great value for the conquering agenda. It gives meaning to human projects, but, paradoxically, humans give meaning to it. The viewpoint expressed about this ‘empty’ land is quite Norman-centric, making it seem as if nothing were on the island before. Again, parallels with American frontier mythmaking seem inevitable. In his fascinating study of the narratives of frontier, Etulain points out that “New England Puritans...spoke of the frontier as a howling wilderness, infested with the Devil and

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<sup>336</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 7:23-28.

his minions, and peopled with barbaric Indians... Since the West was a wild, forbidding place, only historical individuals depicted as strong-armed demigods could pave the way for western settlement."<sup>337</sup> Hence figures like Calamity Jane, Wild Bill Hickok, Billy the Kid, Daniel Boone, and Johnny Appleseed, all both outlaws and heroic clearers of the wilderness. Similarly, William, Payn, and the other William, all historical figures, play the parts of 'strong-armed demigods' in this wilderness narrative. Their efforts give the land purpose and prepare it for fertilization and settlement.

### *Outlaw Lineage*

The irony of all this settlement and civilization is, of course, that the Fitz Waryns tend to act like monstrous, bestial outlaws. They must be exceptionally in touch with the wilderness in order to keep this exceptional, unruly land, but their genetic tendencies also make their family history problematic and savage, undermining the civilizing narrative which is emphasized so single-mindedly in the opening passages of this romance. This story is unique in its postulation of the notion of outlaw heritage – that outlawish traits, the very ones I have identified in my structural analysis of English outlaw traditions in my introductory chapter, are something one can inherit, like blue eyes or an aquiline profile. The idea of an outlaw heritage is

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<sup>337</sup> Richard Etulain, *Re-imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art*, (Phoenix: University of Arizona Press, 1996), xix, xviii.

unique to this text, and worth exploring in detail.<sup>338</sup> As noted earlier, Fulk's family is deeply allied with the *Brut* tradition, but more specifically, with that tradition's more monstrous aspects, with inhuman natives, with monster killers and exiles. Fulk is but one in a long line of bestial heroes, which begins with the giants, then Corineus, then Payn Peverel, then Waryn himself, culminating in the historically composite figure of Fulk Fitz Waryn. The border between Wales and England seems to be the kind of place that makes men into monsters or wild men; first Corineus, then Payn Peverel, and finally Guarin and his progeny seem to feel, or even symbolize the pull of the land. But they are masters only through force, as the prophecy makes clear when it characterizes Blaunche Launde as a magical feminized place which Fulk can only "hold with strife and war" with his sharp teeth and his ferocious nature, as we learned from the prophecy. So let us explore the lineage of outlawry in a little more detail, following the ancestral line to its most illustrious scion, Fulk fitz Waryn. Guarin, or Waryn, the first of the line, is the courtliest of his family, but he is also the most explicitly aligned with nature; he is figured as a sort of green man throughout his portion of the narrative. Before an important tournament, he and his companions camp out in the forest so no one can find or converse with them. He arrives at a tournament completely dressed in leaves, in an elaborate expression of his wild heritage:

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<sup>338</sup> Saga literature, of course, does explore the notion of an outlaw heritage genetically passed down from parent to child, for example, in *VS*, *HSK*, and *ES*.

Guaryn e sa compaignie se tornerent privéement a lur tentes en la foreste, e se desa[r]merent, e grant joie demenerent. E nul des autres grant seignours ne savoient ou yl devyndrent, ne qy yl furent, tant se countindrent coyement, mes de tous furent desconuz. L'endemeyn crié fust partot une joste. Ataunt vynt Garyn a[s] jostes, vestu de foyle de ere tot vert, hors de la foreste, come cely qe fust aventurous e tot desconu.<sup>339</sup>

This green man beats everyone brutally in an elemental struggle for territory, and comes to own both a mate and a precious landscape. He came from wilderness and then conquered it, yet he still remains aligned with the trappings of wildness.

Guarin, made of and for the land, remains on it, but in contrast, his brother Guy was not meant for this specific place. He sets out to bring more land under his dominance: "mas Gwy, le puysné frere, remist en Engleterre, e conquist par coup d'espee meynes beles terres, e si fust apelee Gwy le Estraunge, et de ly vindrent tous les grantz seignours de Engleterre qe ount le sournoun de Estraunge."<sup>340</sup> Thus Guarin is the placed figure, while his brother's very name and identity comes from his being foreign, much as the kings are characterized throughout this romance. But the line which springs from Guarin will continue to be identified with this specific patch of ground in Shropshire, often to such an extent as to seem overly earthy, potentially vulgar.

Many readers of this text have noted that the lines between father and son blur in this 'history.' This is problematic when trying to reconstruct a history of post-

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<sup>339</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 9:19-26.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 10:5-8.

Conquest Marcher lords, but if we read this blurring within the context of a literary exploration of the bestial heroism of a series of warriors, a special 'breed' repeatedly exhibiting a specific set of traits from generation (an analogy the horse- and dog-loving Normans would surely appreciate) it helps us understand the author's perhaps intentional elision of generational differences. A composite Fouke — a mishmash of several different generations of the family, becomes the central figure in the action in this romance, and as one can imagine, his beastly characteristics are quite marked, from the very beginning of his life.

In his youth, Fulk le Brun, the father of the main character Fulk fitz Waryn, is, like Hereward, a coalbiter; he doesn't do anything until egged on by a woman, and then he enters his very first fray wearing a very brutish outfit of rusty armor:

Le vadlet, pur la repreofe que ele avoit dyt, tot enrouy de yre e de maltalent, e s'enva maintenant de la tour, e trova en la sale un viel roynous haubert, e le vesty meyntenant a mieux qu'il savoit, e prist une grose hasche denesche en sa mayn.<sup>341</sup>

Although Fouke le Brun doesn't seem to know how to arm himself correctly, and has chosen his armor and weapons at random, his garb is strangely appropriate for his heritage. His rusty armor and his Danish axe single him out as something a little less sophisticated than one would expect in a romance. He also has a dark, rather

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<sup>341</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 12: 5-9.

unattractive complexion, and straightforward fighting skills.<sup>342</sup> As Fouke le Brun enters the battle, the tone of the narrative descends into rough comedy as we watch this young man in his unwieldy rusty outfit and his hideous, oversized helmet wreak havoc on his unsuspecting enemies:

Fouke aveit un healme lede, e ly covry apoy les espaulles. E a sa premere venue, fery Godard de Bruz, qe aveyt saysy son seignour, de sa hasche, e ly coupa l'eschyne del dors en deus meytés, e remounta son seignour. Fouke se torna vers sire André dé Preez, si ly dona de sa hache en le healme de blanc assier, qe tut le purfendy desqe a[s] dentz.<sup>343</sup>

The description of the armor and the rusty primitive weapons sounds like an afterthought, unless we remind ourselves that this is the kind of grotesquerie which marks the outlaw tradition in particular. It is of great importance that Fouke le Brun should win his forest battle so brutally, because it aligns him with his father, the Green Man, and with his son, the famous outlaw, the wolf who haunts the wastes and terrorizes King John. Fouke le Brun is more in line with brutish than romance heroes, and the language characterizes him as uncouth. He is mistaken as a townsman, he has a dark complexion, and as a lowborn is next in line to an animal, he is thus beastly.

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<sup>342</sup> C.f. Perceval's initial attempts to learn chivalry; he too wears inappropriate clothing, kills enemies in abrupt ways, and begins his career as a wild man.

<sup>343</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 12: 14-20.



And this is the father of Fulk le fitz Waryn, who quickly proves the apple has not fallen far from the tree when we meet him in a childhood spat with the future King John:

Avint qe Johan e Fouke tut souls sistrent en une chambre juauntz a escheks. Johan prist le eschelker, si fery Fouke grant coupe. Fouke se senti blescé, leva le piee, si fery Johan enmy le pys, qe sa teste vola contre la pareye, qu'il devynt tut mat, e se palmea. Fouke fust esbay; mes lee fust qe nul fust en la chambre si eux deus noun. Si frota les oryles Johan, e revynt de palmesoun, e s'en ala al roy, son piere, e fist une grant pleynte.<sup>344</sup>

Although Prince John begins this fight by striking Fulk with a chess piece, Fulk's reaction is visceral, immediate, and disproportionately violent, especially since he owes John his loyalty. He seems to recognize his mistake right away, and reacts like any child fearful of getting in trouble might, by solicitously trying to repair the situation, but the damage is done, and bad blood has been established. All of the subsequent conflict comes to be simply because Fulk was incapable of reining in his congenital predilection for violence. He is fated to become an outlaw, doomed by his very heritage, and we are not surprised, for we have met his ancestors.

### *Fulk's English Outlawry*

Fulk Fitz Waryn's outlawry is the central narrative of this sprawling romance, and in this section of the chapter, we will explore the ways in which Fulk Fitz Waryn's bestial nature and connections to the landscape are emphasized in the

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<sup>344</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 22: 30-39.

descriptions of his outlawry on English soil. At the very beginning of this section of the romance, we quickly gain a sense of the nature of Fulk's outlawry. Enraged at Fouke's depredations, King John calls for his capture in language very reminiscent of contemporary laws concerning the treatment of outlaws:

Quant les marchantz e lur serjantz vindrent naufrez e mayhayniés  
devant le roy, e counterent al roy ce qe Fouke lur chargea, e coment  
Fouke aveit son aver pris, a poy qu'il ne enraga de ire, e fist fere une  
criee parmi le realme que cely qe ly amerreit Fouke, vyf ou mort, yl ly  
dorreit myl lyvres d'argent, e, estre ce, yl ly dorreit totes lé terres qe a  
Fouke furent en Engleterre.<sup>345</sup>

Although the redactor does not use the word 'wolf's head' or 'outlaw', the process of proclaiming Fouke a wanted man throughout the land is a parallel to the wolf-head proclamation, which means the same thing: destroy or capture this menace by any means necessary – vyf ou mort. As a consequence, Fulk can no longer take shelter in the human legal system. John wants his enemy dead or alive, and one presumes that if Fulk were killed by a bounty hunter, his head would be brought to the king as evidence of his demise. As this is a literary creation, not a chronicle, this declaration does more than identify Fouke as a wolf's head. It begins a process

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<sup>345</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 27:28-34. "At last the merchants and their foot-soldiers arrived before the King. Wounded and maimed, they repeated to him all that Fouke had charged them to convey, describing how Fouke had taken the King's property. He became enraged, and in his fury sent out a proclamation throughout the realm. Any person who would bring Fouke to him, dead or alive, would receive a thousand pounds. The King would, moreover, add to this cash reward all the lands that belonged to Fouke in England" (Kelly, "The outlaw versus the lawyer," 697). The phrase 'vyf ou mort' appears once previously, when the king promist to give land to any knight who brought Fulk back 'dead or alive' (see Wright, *The History of Fulk Fitz Warine*, 74).

which repeatedly equates the hero with a hunted animal, and allows the hero and his sidekicks to explore behaviors which would be inappropriate in any other narrative context. They are allowed to explore levels of brutality and animality that would be forbidden territory for a non-exiled romance hero.

Those who hunt the outlaw also slide quickly into the territory of the inhuman/inhumane, as we see in the groups of vigilantes which form to capture Fouke and bring him back 'vyf ou mort.' Their overweening desire for power and money makes fools of them all in their race to claim the outlaw's head, as we see in this entertaining passage:

Quant furent passez une demie luwe de la cité, vindrent apres eux  
.xv. chevalers bien montez e armés, les plus fortz e valyantz de tote la  
meyné le roy, e les comaunderent retorner, e diseyent qu'il aveyent  
promis al roy lur testes. Sire Fouke retorna e dit: 'Beau sires, molt  
fustez fols quant vus promistes a doner ce qe vous ne poez aver.'<sup>346</sup>

What a strange exchange, to calmly inform someone that you desire his head! Laid bare in such a way, this conversation becomes absurd, and Fulk responds with more silliness, thus changing the tenor of what is really a bloodthirsty manhunt. Fulk's flippant tone in his response to his hunters is common to nearly all post-Conquest outlaw narratives, and it makes the savage mechanics of outlawry seem less formidable, and to an extent, mask the deep brutality of the institution. Of course,

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 24-25:36-3.

after this barb, a battle ensues, and the hunting party are humiliated by the crafty Fouke. Once the king learns of this humiliation, he becomes enraged:

Le roy devynt si corocé qe a merveye, e ordina .c. chevalers ou lur meynié d'aler par tot' Engleterre, d'enquere e prendre Fouke, e ly rendre al roy vyf ou mort, e si averount totes lur costages de[1] roy, e, s'il le puissent prendre, le roy les dorreit terres e riche feez. Les chevalers vont par tot' Engleterre quere sire Fouke.<sup>347</sup>

Even the king is brought low in this encounter. He is described as furious, in a kind of bestial rage similar to that which we saw Corineus display in his encounter with the 'tres lede geentz', and his promises to those who can aid him in bringing Fulk to him become extreme and laughable.

But John is unsuccessful, and the hunt continues and increases in intensity.

The connection between Fouke and a hunted animal is made explicit when the hundred knights discover his whereabouts in the forest and organize a large-scale hunt to flush him out:

Les .c. chevalers firent somondre hastivement tot le pays, chevalers, esquiers e serjauntz, e enseggerent tote la foreste tot entour; e mistrent tosours e recevours come furent venours, e mistrent viele gent e autres par tot le champ ou corns, pur escrier Fouke e ces compaignons, quant furent issuz de la foreste. Fouke fust en la foreste, e rien ne savoit de cest affere. Atant oy un chevaler soner un gros bugle ; si avoit suspecion, e comanda ces freres mounter lur destrés. Willam, Phelip, Johan e Alayn, ces freres monterent meynenant. Audulf de Bracy e Baudwyn de Hodenet, Johan Malveysyn monterent ensement. Les treis freres de Cosham, Thomas, Pieres, e Willam, furent bons arblasters, e tote l'autre meyné Fouke furent tost aprestee a le assaut. Fouke e ces compaignouns issirent de

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 26:16-21.

la foreste ; si virent, devant tuz les autres lé .c. chevalers qe les aveynt  
quis parmi Engleterre. Si se ferirent entre eux, e ocistrent Gilbert de  
Mountferrant e Jordan de Colecestre e plusours autres chevalers de la  
compaignie. Si passerent outre parmy les .c. chevalers, e autres foyth  
revyndrent parmy eux, e les abatirent espesement. Atant  
survyndrent tantz chevalers, esquiers, borgeys, serjantz e pueple  
santz nounbre qe Fouke aparçust bien qu'il ne poeit durer la batayle.  
Si se retorna a la foreste; mes Johan son frere fust naufré en la teste  
parmy le healme.<sup>348</sup>

The king's men's method of hunting more resembles a boar-hunt than a wolf hunt,  
but the use of hunting terms and actions points to the author's deep awareness of  
the importance of comparing his outlawed hero to a hunted animal. This metaphor,  
if we should call it that—perhaps equation is a better word—is sustained while the

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<sup>348</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 28: 15-37. "The hundred knights immediately sent out a summons through the countryside. They hastily rounded up knights, squires, and foot-soldiers, in sufficient numbers to encircle the whole forest. As if this were an animal hunt, beaters and receivers were placed at strategic points. Others were positioned throughout the countryside with horns to give warning the moment Fouke and his companions came out of the forest. Fouke, however, remained in the forest, unaware of all this activity. At length he heard a horn sounded by one of the attacking knights. He became suspicious and ordered his brothers to mount their horses. William, Philip, John, and Alan immediately mounted, as did Audulph de Bracy, Baldwin de Hodnet, and John Malveysyn. The three Cosham brothers, Thomas, Pieres, and William, who were good cross-bowmen, and all the rest of Fouke's followers were soon ready for the assault.

"With his companions Fouke came out of the forest and saw, before all the others, the hundred knights who had been hunting him throughout England. In the first rush of battle Fouke's men killed Gilbert de Mountferrant, Jordan de Colchester, and many other knights. They made several passes back and forth through the hundred knights, knocking them down in great numbers. At length, however, many knights, squires, burgesses, foot-soldiers, and people in great numbers joined in the battle. Fouke wisely perceived that he and his men could not continue thus. Finally, after his brother John received a bad head wound, he decided to return into the forest. Fouke and his companions spurred their horses. But before they left, many a good knight, squire, and foot-soldier were slain. People from all over then began to sound the cry, and they were pursued by the populace everywhere they went. At length they entered into a wood and saw a man raising his horn, about to sound the warning. In an instant, one of Fouke's men shot him through the body with a cross-bow bolt. That put a quick end to the warning blast" (Kelly, "The outlaw versus the lawyer," 699).

Fouke and his companions were soon forced to leave their horses and fled on foot towards a nearby abbey.

knights become suspicious that Fulk fitz Waryn is hiding in a forest and set up a hunt, complete with beaters and receivers, horns and hunting weapons.

Significantly, in the 'hunt' for Fulk, there is no mention of dogs, only various 'breeds' of people (chevalers, esquiers, e serjauntz, etc). As the hunt begins, Fulk remains oblivious until he hears the blow of the hunting horn. His order that his men mount their horses is significant, as it blends man with beast in such a way that it makes his charge out of the forest (*se ferirent entre eux*) a reference to a charging herd of wild boar. The charging outlaw band manage to maim or kill a great number of their hunters, and this too reinforces the boar-hunt aspect of this encounter, for one of the great realities of the boar-hunt is that people are likely to be wounded by the enraged and powerful animal. The weapons and the horses of the outlaw band become the tusks and hooves of the metaphorical boar. Finally, realizing they are outnumbered, the outlaws retreat into the woods, echoing the dangerous behavior of a wounded creature that has run to brush. They then desperately search for an escape route, and many of their attackers die as a result.

The human detritus left over after the great hunt, a role which is usually played by wounded dogs, is here played by the unlucky ones who have been wounded in Fulk's rabid charge. Unfortunates who try to blow horns to let the pursuers know where Fulk and his band are stopped before they can press their lips to the instrument – in a brutal litotes, we learn that Fulk 'stops the cry': "Atant

entrerent en une veye, e ne vyrent qe un lever la menee au un corn. Un de la compaignie le fery parmi le corps de un quarel. Atant lessa le cri e la menee. ”<sup>349</sup>

The outlaws will get their revenge for this hunt, however, in the ever-satisfying generic episodes of the ‘hunter-hunted’ variety, which occur twice in the second half of *FFW*. Later in the romance, Fulk seizes upon a chance to capture King John and to force him to return his lands. While William, ever a dedicated hunter, is hunting in the forest, Fulk dresses himself as a collier, complete with pitchfork. He lies in wait in the forest, and when he has spotted his ‘prey,’ he tells King John that he has seen an attractive stag pass through the forest, and that he can lead the ruler to it:

‘Daun vyleyn,’ fet le roy, ‘avez veu nul cerf ou bisse passer par ycy?’  
‘Oyl, mon seignour, pieça.’ ‘Quele beste veitez-vus?’ ‘Sire,  
monseignour, une cornuee, si avoit longe corns.’ ‘Ou est-ele?’ ‘Sire  
monseignour, je vous say molt bien mener la ou je la vy.’ ‘Ore avant,  
daun vyleyn. E nous vous siweroms.’ ‘Sire,’ fet le charboner,  
‘prendroy je rna forche en mayn? Quar, si ele fust prise, je en averoy  
grant perte.’ ‘Oyl, vyleyn, si vus volez.’<sup>350</sup>

This conversation is amusing because we really get a sense of William’s irritated tolerance of this vocal ‘charbonier.’ William just wants to get on with the hunt, but

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<sup>349</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 29:3-5.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 49: 19-26.

the collier's repeated questioning delays him.<sup>351</sup> We chuckle, waiting for the inevitable revelation of the irony of this exchange.

Once in the thick of the forest, the king realizes he has been duped, and that he is in the hands of his enemy, humiliatingly held at pitchfork-point. The king, like a snared creature, trembles with fear – emphasizing his role as a cowardly prey; the tables have been turned on him in ironic inversion:

Fouke e sa meyné saylyrent hors de la espesse, e escrierent le roy, e le pristrent maintenant. 'Sire roy,' fet Fouke, 'ore je vous ay en mon bandon. Tel jugement froi je de vous come vous vodrez de moy, si vous me ussez pris.' Le roy trembla de pour, quar il avoit grant doute de Fouke."<sup>352</sup>

Here it seems likely that the prose redactor of the French romance left out the punchline, since Fulk specifically requests that he be allowed to take his long-pronged collier's pitchfork with him into the woods, yet another example of the bestial hero's using peasant weapons to attack his enemies. Here we can imagine that a long joke was made of the 'long horns' of the particularly magnificent stag, and the way in which King John has inadvertently become the hunted. Here, as before when he was equated with the wild boar, now Fulk fitz Waryn becomes a hunted stag, who in turn, hunts his hunter. This motif appears again in the *Gest of Robin Hood*, and is so similar in tone and storyline that, although it could be a

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<sup>351</sup> This sort of humor can be found in Chretien de Troyes' *Perceval*, particularly in the scene early on when the young Perceval meets some knights in the forest and slows their progress with a spate of naïve questions.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 49:34-39.



floating motif, it is likely that the author of the *Gest* was familiar with some version of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*.

Although Fulk allows the prince to leave, exacting only a promise of pardon and restitution, King John does not repay Fulk's mercy with mercy, but predictably redoubles his efforts to destroy the outlaw. But one day, while hunting in the New Forest, he is captured again by his enemy, in a classic iteration of the hunter hunted motif. Fulk comes upon the king hunting for boar in the New Forest (an echo of Fulk fitz Waryn's being hunted in the style of a boar hunt previously) and capture him, threatening to kill him like an animal in the forest should he not choose to pardon Fulk and return his lands.

Beyond these central 'hunter-hunted' scenes, the romance plays provocatively with the boundaries between the outlawed human and the animal in other ways. For example, while hunting their human quarry at one point in the story, John's minions follow the tracks of Fulk's horses – in the wrong direction. Fulk has shod his company's horses backwards, and in an amusing Bakhtinian inversion, this diverting man-as-beast rides his backwards horse and makes fools of his more civilized, conventional pursuers: “quar le roy e sa gent pursiwyvrent molt sovent sire Fouke par le[s] esclotz des chyvahls; e Fouke molt sovent fist ferrer ces chyvals e mettre les fers a revers, issint qe le roy de sa sywte fust desçu e

engyneer.”<sup>353</sup> Fulk’s wedding is a final example of this sort of generic play; he marries Matilda amidst his companions’ jesting inquiries into whether he plans to bed her in the forest or in a keep. The same wife is forced to give birth to Fulk’s child on the run, on a desolate mountain pass, thus continuing the family’s lineage of connecting with their regional landscape in visceral ways.

Finally, this liminal space between civilized human hero and monstrous subhuman villain is explored through the common beastly-outlaw motif of the doubled, or split hero. Fulk is doubled by two figures in the romance. First, and most disturbingly, he is mirrored by an impostor, who has been committing vicious acts of rapine in Fulk’s name. A monstrous and unprincipled brigand by the name of Piers has taken the nobler outlaw’s name, and he becomes an evil doppelganger of the more principled Fouke in a sort of hypothetical experiment to show how far the monstrous human can go. He perpetrates great crimes in a band, thus sullyng Fouke’s name further:

En cel temps fust un chevaler en la contree qe fust apelee Pieres de Brubyle. Cely Pieres soleit assembler tous les fitz de gentils homes de le pays qe volagous erent, e autre rybaudayle; e soleynt aler par le pays, e ocistrent e robberent lele gent, marchanz e autres. Cely Pieres, quant yl ou sa compaignie ala robber les gentz, se fesoit apeler Fouke le fitz Waryn; pur quey Fouke e ces compaignons furent trop malement aloseez de ce qu’il n’aveyent coupe.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 32:7-9.

<sup>354</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 30-31:36-5. “At that time also there was a knight in the country named Pieres de Bruvyle. This Pieres was in the habit of gathering together all the gentlemen’s sons of the country who were addicted to thieving, along with ribalds. It was their

Fouke takes revenge, predictably, at a feast, where he discovers the false Fouke robbing his noble friends. This robber, Piers, has clearly transgressed by assuming Fouke's name. At issue here is the fact that Fulk, although he may be an outlaw, and associated with wildness in many ways, has never allowed himself to explore such levels of depravity. In their ultimate confrontation, disguised Fouke has entered a castle which is being held by the evil Piers/Fouke, and has come upon a scene in the banquet hall in which a young lady and all the retainers are tied up, and the wicked double is torturing them : "E sire Pieres [e] ces compaignons trestouz furent vysureez, e trestous qe servyrent leynz engenulerent devant sire Pieres, e le apelerent lur seignour sire Fouke. La dame, qe just lyé deleez son seignour en la sale dit molt pitousement: 'Hay, sire Fouke,' fet ele, 'pur Dieu merci! je ne vus unqe mesfis, mes vus ay amee a mon poer."<sup>355</sup> Incensed by the maiden's piteous pleas for mercy to a cruel brigand who is not really him, Fulk springs into action. He orders the pseudo-Fouke to tie up his band of thieves, and forces him to decapitate them. Then, he destroys the false Fouke in a singularly nonchalant manner.<sup>356</sup> Certainly the maiden's piteous, and admittedly maudlin, cries for succor goaded Fulk into action, but his reaction is arguably more monstrous than the actions the wicked Pier/Fouke

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custom to go through the country, killing and robbing decent people, merchants and others. Whenever this Pieres led his company out to rob people, he assumed the name of Fouke Fitz-Waryn. As a result, the real Fouke and his companions had acquired a very bad reputation for matters in which they were blameless" (Kelly, "The outlaw versus the lawyer," 700).

<sup>355</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 31: 13-19.

<sup>356</sup> "Forthwith he cut off Pieres' head, after which he called his companions inside to join him in supper. All made themselves very comfortable" (Kelly, "The outlaw versus the lawyer," 700).

has hitherto performed. Fouke eliminates this troubling double by beheading him and then blithely sitting down to dinner.

Equant tous furent liez, Fouke ly fist couper les testes de tous iceux  
qu'il avoit liez, e, quant yl avoit tous ces compaignons decoleez :  
'Vous, recreant chevaler, qe vous fetez apeler Fouke, vous y mentez.  
Je su Fouke, e ce savez vous bien, e je vus rendroy qe fausement  
m'avez alosee de larcyn.' E ly coupa la teste meyntenant, e quant  
avoit ce fet, apela ces compaignouns ; e soperent la, e se fyrent bien a  
eese.<sup>357</sup>

Here, again, is the strange motif of the bestial outlaw's feast in the presence of vast quantities of blood. That the author had this specific motif in mind is supported by his understated comment: 'They all made themselves very comfortable.' Such comfort eating in the presence of so many decapitated bodies is a nonchalance towards the mixing of food and blood characteristic of bestial outlaws.

Fouke is also doubled in provocative ways by his primary sidekick, the trickster John de Rampaigne. This character is in many ways, a Little John to Fouke's Robin Hood. He is large and violent, crafty and mischievous, and knowledgeable about mysterious, perhaps profane, lore. He often does the 'dirty work' for the courtlier hero. In one passage, John de Rampaigne agrees to spy on Fulk fitz Waryn's enemy, Sir Morris. In order to do so, he literally transforms himself into a bestial hero, complete with berserker antics and violent outbursts. In order to disguise himself, John de Rampaigne chews an herb which puffs up his face and

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 31-32:34-3.

body: "Yl fist tribler un' herbe, e la mist en sa bouche, e sa face comença d'engroser e emflyr moult gros, e tut devynt si descoloree qe ces compaignons demeyne a grant peyne le conuerent."<sup>358</sup> The chewing of the herb to create a puffed-up face and induce extreme strength is tantalizingly reminiscent of the berserker tradition of an earlier heroic age.<sup>359</sup> This herb makes John de Rampaigne subject to violent outbursts, which are described in a way that makes them consonant with the unruly behavior of the violent bestial outlaw.

Johan de Rampaigne fust molt led de vys e de corps, e pur ce, les rybaudz de leynz ly escharnierent e defolurent e detrestrent par ces chevoyls e par ces pees. Yl leva son bastoun, si fery un rybaud en la teste, qe la cervelle vola enemy la place. 'Malveys rybaud,' fet le seignour, 'qey as tu fet?' 'Sire,' fet yl, 'pur Dieu mercy ! Je ne pus meez. J'ai une maladie qe trop est grevouise, e ce poez vere par la face qe j'ay si emflee, e cele maladie me tout certeygues houres de[l] jour tut le seen, dont je n'ay poer mey meismes a gouverner.'<sup>360</sup>

His acts in battle are horrifying and violent, as when he suddenly and completely unexpectedly strikes out someone's brains at a feast (again, blood and food are grotesquely combined). In self-defense, he claims that he can't govern his temper at

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid, 32:16-19. "...prepared himself by first crushing an herb and putting it into his mouth. As a result, his face began to swell so badly that it puffed out" (Kelly, "The outlaw versus the lawyer," 701).

<sup>359</sup> See Howard D. Fabing, "On Going Berserk: A Neurochemical Inquiry," *Scientific Monthly* 83 (1956): 232.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid, 32-33:30-1. "John de Rampaigne was very ugly of face and body, and consequently the scoundrels of the household mocked him. They treated him like a fool, and pulled him by his hair and his feet. He raised his staff and gave one of the scoundrels such a blow on the head that his brains flew into the middle of the room. "Wicked rascal," said the lord, "what have you done?" "Sir," said he, "by God's mercy, I cannot help myself. I have a malady which is very grievous, as you may judge by my face, which is so swollen. This malady takes entire possession of me for certain hours of the day every week. It is not within my own power to contain myself" (Kelly, "The outlaw versus the lawyer," 701).

certain times of the day. Again, this seems in many ways reminiscent of the heroic tradition, full of figures whose strength waxes and wanes with the sun.<sup>361</sup> John de Rampaigne appears to be a shaman/magician trickster figure – he is a master of medicine, disguise, juggling, healing, and strategy. He is able to complete Fulk’s trickster profile, while Fulk is allowed to remain the noble leader, in control of yet untouched by such base trickery, violence, and deception.

In these two doublings of Fulk, we can detect coming to the surface some of the romance writer’s anxieties about his hero’s nobility. He is perhaps aware of the danger of creating a hero who is too grotesque, and thus has emphasized the role of these two mirror-characters, allowing them to bear some of his outlaw hero’s beastly tendencies. But it’s hard to have one’s cake and eat it too, and perhaps he has fallen victim to the same mistake D.H. Lawrence believed James Fennimore Cooper made in his creation of the ‘noble savage’ figure of Natty Bumppo. Lawrence argued that Cooper, as a dandy with pretensions to French writing, found his own character uncouth: “he himself did so love seeing pretty-pretty, with the thrill of a red scalp now and then. Fennimore, in his imagination, wanted to be Natty Bumppo, who, I am sure, belched after he had eaten his dinner. At the same time Mr. Cooper was nothing if not a gentleman.”<sup>362</sup> Lawrence argues that the result of this ambivalent

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<sup>361</sup> C.F. Gawain, whose strength waxes until noon, and wanes after it, or Skallagrim, who becomes darker in mood and more unpredictable around late afternoon.

<sup>362</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, ed. Ezra Greenspan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 54.

response is a problematic series of novels, which are often inconsistent in their portrayal of their beastly hero. The same is perhaps true of this romance.

The play with/anxiety about questions of cannibalism, improper consumption, and monstrous death is a leitmotif in this romance pointing to the anxieties we have already explored in other chapters which surround the figure of the beastly outlaw. We have seen one aspect of this complex of images and anxieties in the way in which, as in Hereward's story, Fulk has an opportunity to rescue a close supporter's castle from its enemy occupiers, and as in that story, he achieves it by slaughtering the company while they sit at dinner, and then picking up the feast where the dead enemy had been interrupted, making merry while their corpses litter the floor. This is another instance of the brutal feast motif, which is one of the hallmarks of the bestial outlaw tradition in England. We see this motif also in the enforced feast motif when Fulk forces the merchants he has just maimed and wounded to break bread with him in his forest hideout. One imagines the dinner conversation was not exactly successful. This savage eating pushes even more into the territory of the bestial in the outlaws' overseas experiences, as, for example when the shipwrecked band "*mangerent lur chivaus pur feym.*"

Another related issue which shines especially clearly in this romance is the fear of one's body being devoured or mishandled after death. On the run from the king, William, one of Fulk's brothers, is wounded, and begs that his comrades cut off his head and take it with him so the king would not know his body when he came upon it – here, the dangerous scavenger after death is no wild animal – rather, the

very king of the land. This shows the author is playing with convention in provocative ways. Fulk's gravely injured brother William, like Little John in the later material, asks that his leader and brother cut off his head so that his enemies cannot display it in victory:

E, quant Fouke les aparçust, plourt e weymente Willam, son frere, e se tient perdu pur tous jours, e Willam lur prie qu'il coupent sa teste e la emportent ou eux, issi qe le roy, quant [ad] trovee son cors, ne sache qui yl fust. Fouke dit qe ce ne freit pur le mounde.<sup>363</sup>

But Fulk, on the other hand, generally more connected to the earth and its processes, is less concerned about the potential human use of his brother's head. He worries about animals devouring his body, and he begs that his body be properly buried lest it be devoured: "messire cosyn, pur l'amour de Dieu, je vous prie qe mon frere qe la gist, quant il est mors, qe vous facez enterrer son cors, qe bestes savages ne le devourent, e les nos, quant mort sumes."<sup>364</sup>

So, as we have seen from these passages, Fulk's adventures as an outlaw in England are full of brutal events, hunts, and killings that reinforce the prophecy's identification of Fulk with the wolf. His behavior is in line with his family's lineage, as well as with the literary lore of the outlaw. He is no hero, despite his author's probably hope that he should be made one, because the bestial outlaw motifs push his character in unsavory directions. He tries to control this effect through doublings

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<sup>363</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 51:32-36.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 52: 5-8.



of Fulks character and other mitigating literary tricks, but in the end, he cannot control his protagonist's trajectory. The romance reads satisfyingly up to this point; Fulk is doing exactly what we expect him to — at least as far as the bestial outlaw tradition is concerned. Once he is pushed out of the island, however, things get a bit more complicated.

### *Fulk Fitz Waryn's overseas outlawry*

In the first iteration of Merlin's prophecy as uttered by the possessed corpse of Geomagog, we learn that the wolf, that is, Fulk Fitz Waryn, will go to sea after fighting on land for some time. The prophecy ignores its heraldic prerogative, and does not shift symbolic animals at this juncture — Fulk does not become a seabird or anything — so he is a 'seawolf,' a current term for piracy which extends the space of outlawry to the sea. As a seawolf, Fulk continues the patterns he established as a landbound outlaw; as a wolf that dwells in the water with the fish, he is a pirate and behaves in a rapacious, subversive manner. As if once were not enough, the author seems determined that we connect the dots here as he takes us away from England into the lands of Fulk's exile. He wants us to understand that although the location has changed, Fulk's nature has not, nor has the import of the story. He is still a bestial outlaw, just one a bit further afield than usual, for in the second half of this romance, the space of contention has moved outwards to isles encircling the British Isles — after William the Conqueror's clearing and colonization of the borders of English lands, there exist no more marvels on English soil, which is now taken up

with internecine quarrels. The space for the marvelous is moving outwards, and, the implicit logic of this poem demonstrates, the bestial hero must move toward that wild space. The crude giants on the islands which Fulk visits in his monster-killing exile bear a striking resemblance to those encountered by Corineus and later Payn Peverel, but their location is *beyond*.<sup>365</sup> The author of this narrative can't stop conquering landscapes and savages, and when they are made extinct in the well-known lands of southwestern England, they must be sought further afield.

In many ways, Fouke's journeys abroad are typical romance adventures: rescuing princesses from dragons, killing evil fairy/peasants/dwarves/robbers on islands, fighting giants, and hanging out with Saracens. In this, they echo the trajectory of Hereward's overseas adventures. But, as in the case of Hereward, these otherwise farfetched fantastical adventures are brought in line with Fulk's more prosaic adventures at home through the use of bestial outlaw/bear's son motifs. In one adventure, Fulk fitz Waryn battles a bearded dragon with human intelligence that 'prefers human flesh to any other' – and seeks out princesses to rape and murder. In many ways, Fulk's confrontation with this humanoid dragon is similar to Hereward's encounter with the rapist bear. Both are animals that cross the threshold between humans and animals in very disturbing ways, trying to mate with human women, and yet also killing and eating humans. They are liminal

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<sup>365</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 128.

mirror images of the heroes themselves, both of whom also straddle the human-animal divide quite uneasily.<sup>366</sup>

Fulk's adventures abroad also help to make the hero seem a bit more human, on the expanded relative continuum of monsters, beasts, and warriors provided in these marvelous adventures. For example, in the magic isle of Scotland the people live by their beasts ("vivent de ler bestes"), that is, eat only flesh.<sup>367</sup> Fulk seems much more civilized when compared to such folk. He may eat meals surrounded by dead bodies or bed his wife in the wilderness, but he is not as wild as that!

Similarly, when Fulk visits a mythical, imagined Iceland, he encounters a wild land of magical robbers. At first contact the natives of this island seem fantastically big, all wearing green, with clubs, and seem at least semi-supernatural. We meet these creatures and assume they must be supernatural, but they simply turn out to be a gigantic colony of thieves—the green they wear and the opulence with which they surround themselves is not the fairies' but the outlaws' green; not the fairies' underground riches, but the outlaws' stolen wealth. Again, the author playfully builds suspense by straddling two generic categories, only to surprise the audience with the punch line. These monstrous thieves (they are explicitly called 'larssons') trap Fulk in a deadly enforced game of courtesy; in another inversion, the

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>367</sup> See Giraldus Cambrensis' *Topographia Hibernica* (for the classic example of the figure of wild people who are dehumanized because they eat nothing but flesh). Giraldus Cambrensis, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, eds. John S. Brewer and James F. Dimock (New York: Penguin, 1982).

tables are turned on the outlaw, and now wilder creatures than they trap them in their own game of enforced courtesy.<sup>368</sup> The fairy story – I am tempted to say *fornaldarsaga* – at the heart of the *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* story bears the stamp of the Northern outlaw tradition, in which a brutal and marginalized hero enters a foreign fairyland, and proceeds to wipe out the even more monstrous inhabitants in some form of beheading game.<sup>369</sup>

### *Conclusion*

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, early critics of the romance of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* were disgusted by the monstrous brutality they saw in this “almost worthless” text. Eyton, for example, says impatiently that “Fouke le Fitz Waryn was a giant in strength and prowess, but nothing more, if we take the statements of his panegyrist, who seems however to have been of too coarse a mind to appreciate true chivalry even if it had appeared in his hero.”<sup>370</sup> If we view Fulk fitz Waryn’s brutality as part of what his author intended him to be – a bestial outlaw – then we needn’t be so hard on this poor panegyrist. Fulk fitz Waryn’s coarseness, and lack of true ‘chivalry’ is not a lack of understanding on the author’s part, rather, it is the result of a consciously formed intention to clearly mark Fulk fitz Waryn as bestial. I hope this brief study has shown how closely the narrative of

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<sup>368</sup> Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, 43-44:6-34.

<sup>369</sup> c.f. Thorstein’s behavior in the tale *Thorstein House-Might*

<sup>370</sup> Robert William Eyton, *Antiquities in Shropshire*, (Shropshire, England: J.R. Smith, 1854), 1:134.

*Fouke le fitz Waryn* follows the basic form of bestial outlaw stories in England. It is an impressive testament to the strength and primacy of this insular myth that we have seen very 'English' examples of bestial outlaw stories now in two non-English tongues, which nevertheless, add to and amplify this native outlaw tradition. The stories of Fulk Fitz Waryn are interesting within the context of this larger project in the unique ways they present the notion of an outlaw heritage, in their distinctive dramatization of the land as a frontier inhabited by bestial outlaw heroes, and in the fascinating ecological vision they convey of a landscape in a state of rapid change.

They are also interesting because they show how the endless cycles of inversion, of predator and prey, of natural conquest and natural resistance are present in all the outlaw material, and they are, in a way, at the heart of the narratives. The paradox lies in the fact that each narrative then manages to engage with specific landscapes, seemingly in spite of what often can seem like predetermined folkloric reactions. What this argument pushes towards is an understanding of this paradox as the fundamental reality of the outlaw tradition — that they can be both generic and specific in their comprehension of the natural world at the same time.

And the story of Fulk Fitz Waryn was very influential in the subsequent development of the English outlaw tradition. As many critics have noted, many specific motifs apparently original to the Fulk Fitz Waryn tradition appear again in the Robin Hood material. But its influence reaches into the Scottish outlaw tradition

as well, as we see in this fascinating passage in *the Bruce*, when Robert the Bruce goes mad and enters the forest:

And wele I understode that the kyng Robyn  
Has dranken of that blade the drink of dan Waryn.  
Dan Waryn he les tounes that he held,  
With wrong he mad a res and misberyng of scheld.  
Sithen into the foreste he 3ede naked and wade,  
Als a wilde beste ete of the gres that stade;  
Thus of dan Waryn in his bake men rede;  
God 3yf the kyng Robyn that alle hys kynde so  
spede!

Robert the Bruce's madness is equated with that of Fulk Fitz Waryn, which is a bit of a surprise, for the text as it comes down to us in its English or French summary contains no mad scene along these lines. His madness is also connected with that of King Nebuchadnezzar, whom this poet at least seems to see as a figural ancestor of the bestial outlaw tradition. This results in a strange comingling of gesture in this passage – Robert the Bruce drinks blood, at least metaphorically, and then eats grass, in a classic example of the strange mixed message of the outlaw tradition. But what matters here in the conclusion of this chapter is the fact that the best parallels the author of the *Bruce* can summon are significant. Nebuchadnezzar and Fulk Fitz Waryn are birds of a feather, and important cornerstones of the English beastly outlaw tradition as envisioned by subsequent authors.

CHAPTER 7  
THE MENACE IN THE GREENWOOD

And so bifel that ones on a day  
This somnour, evere waityng on his pray,  
Rood for to somne an old wydwe, a ribibe,  
Feynyng a cause, for he wolde brybe.  
And happed that he saugh bifore hym ryde  
A gay yeman, under a forest syde.  
A bowe he bar, and arwes brighte and kene;  
He hadde upon a courtepy of grene,  
An hat upon his heed with frenges blake.  
"Sire," quod this somnour, "hayl, and wel atake!"  
"Welcome," quod he, "and every good felawe!  
Wher rydestow, under this grene-wode shawe?"

Studies of the Robin Hood and the Greenwood material have long been the province of medieval historians, who continue to discuss the political agenda and the audience of a fairly disparate group of poems and tales. The debates over whether Robin Hood songs were performed for a gentry, merchant, or peasant class will probably never be settled, as the evidence is simply too scanty to be conclusive.<sup>371</sup> Few literary critics have studied the Greenwood material as literature, analyzing its themes and aesthetics as objects of study in themselves.<sup>372</sup> Beyond its

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<sup>371</sup> On this, see R. H. Hilton, "The Origins of Robin Hood," *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 197-210; J. C. Holt, "The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood," in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism* ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 211-232; and John Bellamy, *Robin Hood: An Historical Enquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

<sup>372</sup> But see Douglas Gray, "The Robin Hood Poems," in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 3-37; and Stephen Knight, "'Harkeneth Aright': Reading Gamelyn for Text not Context," in *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval*

value to a history of the late medieval period in England and Scotland, the Greenwood material is rich, thematically complex literature. It surges with unruly life, mystery, humor, and above all, violence, and often returns to certain themes that are integral to the outlaw tradition at large and the Greenwood material in particular. Some of these themes, such as anticlerical and antiauthoritarian satire, will remain peripheral to this study because others have dealt with them. This study focuses upon the layers of the material that identify the Greenwood outlaws with beasts, asking how each poem deals with the themes of violence, death, natural beauty, and animality that run throughout the corpus.

In his 15<sup>th</sup> century history, Walter Bower, a Scottish historian writing a continuation of John of Fordun's *Scotichronicon*, noted the generic and emotional range traversed by the figure of Robin Hood, who could be portrayed as a tragic or comic figure, a brute or a gentleman, although the first label he applies, significantly, is *murderer*:

Then arose the famous murderer, Robert Hood, as well as Little John, together with their accomplices from among the disinherited, whom the foolish populace is so inordinately fond of celebrating both in tragedies and comedies, and about whom they are delighted to hear the jesters and minstrels sing above all other ballads. About whom also certain praiseworthy things are told....<sup>373</sup>

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*Romance*, ed. Rosalind Field (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 15-27, who have both expressly applied themselves to this dearth in two articles which pave the way for this study.

<sup>373</sup> Latin text, Child, III, 41; trans. A. I. Jones. "Hoc intempore de exheredatis surrexit & caput erexit ille famosissimus siccarius Robertus Hode & littill Johanne cum eorum complicitibus de



If such generic and thematic diversity was common to the legend, it is no wonder that the extant Greenwood material proves fundamentally paradoxical. These paradoxes are what make the outlaw ballads so interesting and so enigmatic; like any great literature, it remains protean and allusive. The following introductory section will deal with many aspects that nearly all the Greenwood ballads hold in common – violent bestial behavior, a fixation on food and the mechanics of obtaining and eating food, the menace of the human predator lurking in the forest, hunting both deer and other humans, the splitting of the bestial outlaw into two characters—one courtly and one brutish – the standardized literary depiction of wild spaces like the greenwood and the Wild North, before we turn to the specific aspects of individual ballads.

### *Violence and Outlawry*

In an important article on the violence inherent to the Robin Hood and general Greenwood tradition, Richard Firth Green notes that the early ballads are characterized by “a marked streak of ruthless violence” which is “the very antithesis of the mood of chivalrous fair play that we have come to expect of these romantic

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quibus stolidum vulgus hianter in comoediis et tragoediis prurienter restum faciunt et super ceteras romancias, mimos, et bardanos canitare delectantur."

denizens of the Greenwood."<sup>374</sup> The bloodshed is often sudden and brutal, sparing no one – innocent bystanders, children, and women are all endangered at one time or another. This likely reflects medieval outlaw life in reality, a war of attrition which often damaged citizens and targets alike. Chivalry of a simplified kind does appear in the texts often enough for it to seem likely that in the mind of the ballad-masters, these two qualities – chivalry and brutality – went hand-in-hand and were not exclusive categories. In few works of chivalric literature do the precepts of chivalric comportment preclude brutality – rather, they tend to legitimize that violence.

An examination of the outlaw life in history helps answer the question of how much the violence represented in the ballads are a reflection of real-life problems of outlawry. The life of a late medieval outlaw was very different in many ways from that of his predecessors. In the first place, the outlaw no longer wore the wolf's-head officially. Starting in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century, vigilantes could no longer hunt outlaws with impunity, as the outlaws were also entitled to due process of law.<sup>375</sup> This did not change the lore of the literary outlaw too much, however –

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<sup>374</sup> 'A Great Effusion of Blood'? : *Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Meyerson, Mark Douglas, Daniel Thiery, Oren Falk. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.

<sup>375</sup> See R. H. Hilton. "The Origins of Robin Hood," *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 204. An interesting example of outlaws using legal process to support their criminal activities can be found in E.L.G. Stones' engrossing history of "The Folvilles of Ashby-Folville and their associates in crime 1326-1347" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 7, 5<sup>th</sup> Ser. (1957): 117-136.

Robin Hood and other Greenwood outlaws are continually depicted as being hunted ruthlessly, to the death if need be, by both legal authorities and bounty-hunters.

In many regions, especially during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, outlaws held considerable sway and had developed intricate social systems somewhat similar to the modern mafia, gaining control of the very institutions from which they had been legally excluded. The element of Bahktinian Carnavalesque in the Greenwood material – the inversion or mirroring of established social hierarchy, the subverting of conventional rule – was in reality more than a literary convention.<sup>376</sup> For example, the feared and formidable Folville gang managed to attack and hang some authorities who had themselves intended to hang some of their cohorts; they tore down the gibbet and rescued the captive outlaws.<sup>377</sup> Similarly, the town of Scarborough was held by gangs of outlaws twice in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and their rule replaced that of the official authorities.<sup>378</sup> So the element of the Robin Hood poems that modern critics have identified as a literary trope of carnival inversion was in fact a reality for many; people probably lived in real fear of those swashbuckling adventures erupting into their living spaces. Such inversions could result in

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<sup>376</sup>For a compelling analysis of the Carnavalesque in Robin Hood material, see Peter Stallybrass, "'Drunk with the Cup of Liberty': Robin Hood, the Carnavalesque, and the Rhetoric of Violence in Early Modern England," in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 297-327.

<sup>377</sup> Stallybrass, "Drunk with the Cup of Liberty," 298.

<sup>378</sup> Barbara A. Hanawalt. "Ballads and Bandits: Fourteenth-Century Outlaws and the Robin Hood Poems," in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 277.

starvation during a holdout and siege, rape, loss of provisions, and other unfortunate consequences for citizens – it was for them literally a situation of a wolf at the door.

As a tool for comparison, let us consider the laws of nature: In his book *Monster of God*, David Quammen explores the natural conundrum of prey and predator relations, finding that “the weak, the homeless, the unsupportable offspring...are the victim classes of predators. By contrast, healthy creatures holding good territories have little to fear” from alpha predators. Extending this insight to human communities, he shows that “the poorest villages around the perimeter of [India’s] Gir forest have little appreciation of lions. No one wants to be among the ‘wastage parts’ of the human population.” The costs of alpha predators are “borne disproportionately by poor people...while the spiritual and aesthetic benefits of those magnificent beasts are enjoyed from afar.”<sup>379</sup> This is certainly true of the peasant population bordering woodlands and other outlaw territories in the later Middle Ages, who likely were constrained to clothe and feed outlaws. They bore the brunt of their activities, and it is unlikely that they admired their bold feats with the same zeal as a group further removed from their depredations would. Parallels with this phenomenon are ample in modern America. For example, one doubts the citizens of Chicago directly affected by the gangster culture much enjoyed being

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<sup>379</sup> Quammen, *Monster of God*, 123 (see chap. 1, n. 11).

caught in the middle of a tommy-gun shootout between rival gangs, or suddenly finding themselves among the 'wastage parts' of that society. But both Hollywood writers and average Americans romanticized the figures in Chicago in the 30's, lionized their heroism, and ignored the deadly consequences of their actions. The medieval ballads of the Greenwood do account for the cost of supporting outlaws. In Robin Hood and the Monk, for example, when Robin Hood is trapped in a church by the villagers and the Sherrif's men, he aims straight for the place where "the schereff and his men stode thyckust," and "Thryes thorow at them he ran then, / For sothe as I yow sey, / And woundyt mony a moder son, / And twelve he slew that day."<sup>380</sup> Although the cost of this particular outlaw is borne by the unfortunate lackeys of the villain, the ballad-master's diction, his descriptions of the victims as 'mothers' sons' humanizes them and draws the audience's attention to the human loss of life. A more poignant example of the hapless victim of the outlaw's wild violence occurs later on in this same ballad, when Much the Miller's son smites off the head of the 'littul page' who attends a crooked monk.<sup>381</sup> Again, the description of the page as 'little' excites sympathy in the readers, humanizing the outlaws' victim and making his death seem a pathetic waste of young life. But in their unflinching description of 'wastage' parts of the human population, the Greenwood ballads accurately depict the reality of the bandit behaviors in the late medieval period.

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<sup>380</sup> 105-110. "He ran at them three times, and as I'm telling you the truth he wounded many a mother's son and slew twelve that day."

<sup>381</sup> 205.

At times these social structures of banditry extended to include people fairly high up in the class system, who were bought off or simply acted in collusion with the criminal element. For example, in Nottinghamshire, which was plagued by the rebellious acts of a certain Roger Godbeard and his outlaw band, a “local knight of some prominence” named Richard Foliot evidently sheltered the besieged criminals in his castle for some time before finally surrendering to the good-sized militia which had been assembled by the sheriff to apprehend the criminals. This is a scenario we actually see played out in “The Gest of Robin Hood,” where the knight Sir Richard atte Lee repays a loan made to him by Robin Hood and his men by sheltering them and feeding them while they are besieged by the Sheriff and his men.<sup>382</sup>

Some particularly powerful outlaws found themselves in a position to make their own law – if they were not in-law within society’s normal view, they followed their own code, sometimes to the extreme of crowning their own king. What once seemed a strictly literary and festal convention, the outlaw king, was in fact a reality. And, interestingly enough, in the records remaining to us, fact and fiction seem to blend almost seamlessly. In what seems a very postmodern way, the outlaw leaders seem to be actively playing with the legendary outlaw material, making their own activities seem larger than life by quoting literary conventions and royal documents

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<sup>382</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, 32 (see chap. 1, n. 8).

in a wild and intriguing blend of fact and fiction. For example, a letter from a supposed 'outlaw king' was addressed to an enemy thus in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century:

Lyonel, roi de la route de raveners a nostre faux et desloiaux Richard de Snaweshill', salutz saunz amours. Nous vous maundoms sur peyne de qauntque vous poez forfaire coudre nous et nos leys, qe vous, vewes cestes noz lettres, vous ostenz nettement de celui qu vous meynetenetz en la vicarie de Burton' Anneys... Et si vous ne veullez avoir regard a noz maundementz, nous maunderoms a nostre viscounte du North', qil face sur vous la graunde destresce come devaunt est dit. Donez a nostre chastiel de Bise, en la Tour de Vert', e lan de nostre regne primer.<sup>383</sup>

The tone of this letter is unambiguously regal, and precludes argument on any matter of authority. That Lionel calls himself king of the 'route of raveners' is particularly allusive; as we have seen in the previous chapters, the adjective 'ravener' is often used in collocation with outlaws and with bands of wolves, and likely is meant to register on this menacing level here. The outlaw king signs off by noting that the letter was "given in our Castle of the North Wind, in the Green Tower, in the first year of our reign." E.L.G. Stones marvels at the mixed tone of this letter in his article on outlaw gangs: "With its allusions drawn at one extreme from romance and at the other from the harsh realities of contemporary legal process, this

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<sup>383</sup> 'Lionel, king of the rout of raveners salutes, but with little love, his false and disloyal Richard de Snaweshill. We command you, on pain to lose all that can stand forfeit against our laws, that you immediately remove from his office him whom you maintain in the vicarage of Burton Agnes, and that you suffer that the Abbot of St Mary's have his rights in this matter. For the full text, see E. L. G. Stones, "The Folvilles of Ashby-Folville, Leicestershire, and Their Associates in Crime, 1326-4," 134-35; for historical commentary, see Hanawalt, "Ballads and Bandits," 272.

is an extraordinary document.”<sup>384</sup> Certainly ‘King Lionel’s’ alliance with the north, with green space, and with kingship – he inhabits a magical-sounding space that echoes descriptions of fairy and outlaw abodes – gives us an especially vivid picture of the ways in which real outlaw kings might have acted in the late Middle Ages by drawing consciously on the prestige narrative offered by the Greenwood material, and offers an intriguing historical parallel to the great fictional outlaw kings of this period. It also shows the easy slippage of fiction into reality.

All of these realities made outlaws unpopular in the late medieval world. Hanawalt notes that murderers were convicted less often than bandits, who were truly outsiders and scapegoats, and that “only in the sixteenth century, when the real problems of bandits were curtailed, did Robin Hood become a hero.”<sup>385</sup> I would qualify this by adding that the changed landscape of the early-modern period and the construction of a ‘Merry Olde England’ narrative also contributed to this change. But it certainly seems that the somewhat monstrous outlaws we see in the late medieval ballads are reflections of this historical unpopularity of, or at least ambivalence towards, contemporary outlaws. The noble Robin Hood we know today is an early modern creation, as the Robin Hood who appears in the earliest poems is a very different beast entirely. His actions, and those of his ‘meynee’ are

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<sup>384</sup> Stones, “The Folvilles of Ashby-Folville,” 135.

<sup>385</sup> Hanawalt, “Ballads and Bandits,” 280.



bestial, although the kinds of creatures used as metaphors for the outlaws' depredations vary significantly.

### *Hunting*

The necessity of hunting deer is probably a major factor in the continued portrayal of outlaws as predators during a time when the real predators were extinct or extremely marginalized geographically. Since outlaw bands occupy the previous habitat of these predators, and similarly decimate wildlife populations, the folklore surrounding wolves and bears is easily transferred to their activities. Like beasts in their natural habitat, the fictional outlaws are deeply wedded to their surroundings and almost incapable of survival outside their habitat—in several Robin Hood ballads, most notably the *Gest*, it is clear that if Robin Hood is removed too long from his native haunt, he will certainly die of heartbreak. In the *Gest*, the notion of Robin's dependence on the greenwood for not only his livelihood, but also his life itself is made quite clear. After having stayed at court for a year, Robin begins to pine for 'home':

"Alas!" then sayd good Robyn,  
"Alas and well a woo!  
Yf I dwele lenger with the kynge,  
Sorowe wyll me sloo."<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> 1749-1752: "Alas, then said good Robin, alas, and welaway! If I dwell any longer with the king, sorrow will slay me!"

He is not only equated with the greenwood; like an animal outside his natural setting, he cannot survive long away from it.

Echoing the standard folklore about the ravages of wolves, which has been a part of the propaganda against them for a very long time, the ballad outlaws decimate the previously stable populations of deer in their woods. They do not practice any form of methodical stewardship, seemingly preferring to kill any and all deer within their purview, whether they be hungry or not. In the *Gest*, the king, visiting the Greenwood in disguise, is very disturbed to find that his herds of deer have been depleted by the outlaw bands: "There our kynge was wont to se / Herdes many one, / He coud unnethe fynde one dere, / That bare ony good horne."<sup>387</sup> In "Robin Hood and the Monk," Little John, in line with his character as the more rapacious of the two lead outlaws, declares what seems to be one of the band's official policies: "spare none of the venison."<sup>388</sup> The outlaws of late medieval balladry may be yeomen, in the sense that they are a band of 'young men,' retainers of Robin Hood, but they are no *yeomen*, stewards of the forest and its populations.

If Robin Hood and his men do not act like foresters, conserving and maintaining sustainable populations, neither do they behave like nobles on a hunt,

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<sup>387</sup> 1429-1432.

<sup>388</sup> 145.

in spite of other critics' arguments to the contrary.<sup>389</sup> Instead, they act like animals. First, the outlaws have no dogs, and dogs are absolutely central to a civilized medieval hunt. Modern readers may have no problem imagining a solitary hunt with nothing but a weapon – a rifle perhaps – and one's wits, but in medieval and early modern England, as across the entire continent, the hunt was a highly organized ritual performance which required many players. Rogers notes in her survey of the hunt motif in Pan-European balladry that horses, hounds and hawks are a fundamental part of the entire corpus of hunting ballads throughout Europe, and are rarely absent, but in the Greenwood ballads, no hounds bay nor horses charge.<sup>390</sup> The outlaws' conspicuous lack of any of these necessary hunting accoutrements would immediately call an audience's attention to their difference. Of course, they are poaching, but many other aspects of the narratives defy practical logic, and one imagines that if the ballad audiences wanted to see Robin Hood as a noble hunter, they would make him one, realism be damned. But the ballad audience prefers to see the band itself acting in concert as the dogs or wolves would. They also stalk quarry – human or animal – in concert and attack so suddenly that their hapless victim finds himself surrounded.

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<sup>389</sup> The most recent and developed argument in support of the formality of the outlaws' hunt can be found in Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood: the late-medieval stories in historical context* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>390</sup> Edith Randam Rogers, *The perilous hunt: symbols in Hispanic and European balladry* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980).

Finally, contrary to what one might expect, the famous Greenwood theme of conflict over the use of the king's deer, the issue of forest law is not very prominent in the early material.<sup>391</sup> With the exception of those in the *Gest*, which belong to the king, the deer lack an explicit owner (although perhaps the king would have been implicit in the minds of the storytellers and audiences) and their death serves more to emphasize the power and menace of the outlaw band, which moves swiftly as one organ, than to emphasize the impact of forest law. Barnesdale, the setting of most of the early poems, was never at any point a *forest*, which in official terminology meant a place where formal chases would be held under the Kings auspices, and as Holt noted, forest law issues are simply not prominent in the early Robin Hood material.<sup>392</sup>

Although the outlaw bands do regularly prey upon deer, they also stalk a human prey, the 'fat-headed monks' and 'wicked sheriffs.' In a satirical inversion of old lore, the wolfish churchmen in sheep's clothing we met in Anglo-Saxon England now become the sheepish prey of the wolf-heads.<sup>393</sup> Similarly, the 'hard orders' of the forest fraternity – while certainly satirizing the more civilized hard orders of the monastery – also echo the pack structure of wolves.<sup>394</sup> These forest 'wolves' prey

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<sup>391</sup> On forest law, see note 164 of the *Gest*.

<sup>392</sup> See Holt, *Robin Hood*.

<sup>393</sup> See chapter 2 of this dissertation for the depiction of bad churchmen as wolves in sheep's clothing.

<sup>394</sup> In the "Gest of Robin Hood," the parody is explicit: "'This is harder order,' sayde the sherief, 'Than any ankir or frere'" (789-790).

upon the religious wolves in sheep's clothing, and their hierarchy is much more efficient. These parodic structures help draw the audience's attention to the idea that the monastic system also breeds creatures who, by their nature, prey upon the land around them, sustaining their orders with the lifeblood of the laypeople who must work so hard to maintain their population. Upon consideration of the intensity of the anti-church satire in the Greenwood material, it seems improbable that the composers of these ballads would not seek to emphasize these parodic contrasts.

In a final layer of irony, these hunters often become the hunted. The most basic reality of the Greenwood material is the human being as simultaneously hunter and quarry. The outlaws and their enemies take turns in each of these roles throughout the extant corpus, but the theme never fades. It is the central irony on which almost all the action hinges. The generically fluid atmosphere of the Greenwood allows for play between these categories of being, and for a happy mixing of metaphor. Nagy notes that the "playful confusion of human and animal indicates the liminality of Robin and his men, who live in a world where identity is fluid and separate categories of identity can blend"<sup>395</sup>

### *The Magic Hart*

In the *Gest*, Little John-cum-Reynard lures the Sheriff of Nottingham into a trap by telling him a tale of a miraculous green hart which lives in the forest:

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<sup>395</sup> Nagy, *The Wisdom of the Outlaw*, 413.

"Yonder I sawe a ryght fayre harte,  
His coloure is of grene;  
Seven score of dere upon a herde  
Be with hym all bydene.  
"Their tyndes are so sharpe, maister,  
Of sixty, and well mo,  
That I durst not shote for drede,  
Lest they wolde me slo."<sup>396</sup>

The Sheriff, eager to hunt such a wondrous beast, allows Little John to run alongside his horse all the way into Barnesdale, and into a trap, for sure enough, the green hart turns out to be no real deer at all, but 'Bold Robin' — his majestic antlers, Robin Hood's prickly quiver of arrows. Little John, again, relishes his dupe's discomfiture and very real fear:

And whane they came before Robyn,  
"Lo, sir, here is the mayster-herte."  
Still stode the proude sherief,  
A sory man was he;  
"Wo the worthe, Raynolde Grenelefe,  
Thou hast betrayed nowe me."<sup>397</sup>

Here, Robin Hood is no longer the alpha wolf in charge of a band of hungry followers, but the kingly stag. The description of Robin Hood as a 'masyster-herte' echoes the notion of the master outlaw, and makes for an amusing joke at the expense of the nonplussed Sheriff, who stands 'full still' when he becomes fully

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<sup>396</sup> 737-744. "Yonder I saw a very fair hart; his color is of green. 140 other deer in a herd are at his bidding? Their horns are so sharp, master, of sixt points and more, that I dared not shoot out of fear lest they slay me"

<sup>397</sup> 751-756. "And when they came before Robin, "Lo sir, here is the master-hart." The proud sheriff stood completely still; a sorry man was he: "May woe befall you, Reynold Greenleaf — you have betrayed me now."

aware of his betrayal and his danger. At that moment, the Sheriff, usually an unsympathetic symbol of oppression, becomes almost pitiable as he curses his captors, expressing his fear and anger at Little John's betrayal.

Robin Hood remains dangerous in his stag form; his antlers are so sharp they scare as formidable an opponent as Little John, who pretends to fear injuring the deer and then falling victim to its dying rage. Little John, however, remains emphatically canine, mischievously coursing ahead of the sherrif in their 'hunt.' As we can see, at some point Robin Hood has become more of a deer than a wolf, as is evidenced not only in this poem, but also in "Robin Hood and Gandelyn" and "Robin Hood and Guy of Guisborne." This is not true of all the late medieval outlaw ballads; in some of the other ballads, the predatory motif is still strong. In many ways, the outlaws have come to be portrayed in the late middle ages as both predators and as deer, and this leads to some extremely odd imagery, as well as making the hunted hunter motif even more paradoxically complex.

The convention in ballad material of the unsuccessful hunt must be one of the most powerful influences upon the development of this motif. As Rogers argues,

The introductory motif of the unlucky hunt would be comparable to a prologue in the theater or an emblematic song that creates the appropriate mood in the theater before the curtain rises. The purpose of the hunt motif is to suggest that the protagonist has entered the realm of an unknown fate against which he is powerless. This impression is achieved in two ways simultaneously: the failure of the hunt symbolizes the hunter's defeat in the subsequent action, and the

association of the hunt and the dark forest with many kinds of supernatural beings...evokes the presence of unfathomable forces.<sup>398</sup>

In this context, whether Robin Hood is depicted as the quarry of the unlucky hunt or as the unlucky hunter would signify to a well-trained audience where exactly he stands in the action – is he doomed, or does he represent the uncanny forces of fate? In this particular case, he is the sheriff's doom, but in other texts, such as *Robin and Gandelyn*, he himself is doomed – his unlucky hunt signifies a greater doom. So powerful was the symbolic system of the unlucky hunt that it is no wonder that sometimes the other, older, symbol of the bestial outlaw – the wolf or fox – should fall at times into obscurity.

In a way, then, Robin Hood and his men *are* deer; according to the polysemic conventions of balladry, the metaphor is an aesthetic reality. Balladry often uncritically straddles human/ animal divides, especially when the ballads are set in natural locales, as if human is no longer an absolute category separate from beast. The ballads often achieve this merging of different species with such natural grace that it seems the only right thing in the circumstances.

### ***Food and Trauma***

There is also a possibility that the Greenwood material, in its obsession with violence and food, exhibits traces of trauma after the massive famine of 1315-17,

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<sup>398</sup> Rogers, *The Perilous Hunt*, 194.



when swarms of peasants were uprooted from their homes and roamed the countryside, robbers proliferated, and awful food was consumed by necessity. In fact, even cannibalism was not unknown in England.<sup>399</sup> The experience of having come so close to a bestial, inhuman state, as a society, may have resulted in a marked increase in Greenwood narratives, which engage with exactly this nexus of questions. It seems perhaps as likely, if not more so, that the trauma of these events during the Great Famine spawned the great proliferation of Greenwood narratives, not the peasant revolt of 1381, as previously thought.<sup>400</sup>

And human events and natural events were interdependent, as Richard Hoffmann notes: "the human disasters for which the 14<sup>th</sup> century is famous occurred on a natural stage that was itself undergoing great perturbations."<sup>401</sup> The famine was direct result of a drought-ridden land that had failed its inhabitants, who depended on the land for sustenance and security. Many Englishpeople could have recognized their precarious position in a changing climate a new kind of economy. The Greenwood as an imagined space became, as a consequence, a refuge from a dangerous and changing world, a sign for a fantasy of fullness and of need, of idyllic

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<sup>399</sup> For an in-depth account of the inhumanity of the famine, see William Chester Jordan's *The Great Famine: northern Europe in the early fourteenth century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>400</sup> On the effects of the Famine, see also Ponting, *A New Green History of the World*, and May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 49-51.

<sup>401</sup> Richard Hoffmann, "Homo et Natura, Homo in Natura: Ecological Perspectives on the European Middle Ages," in *Engaging with Nature: Essays on the Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 18.

peace and brutal violence, of a just society and lawless anarchy. In its paradoxes, it reflected the anxieties brought upon real people by these massive natural and social changes, and offered a stage upon which to play out these paradoxes as a means of coming to terms with them.

In the Greenwood material the outlaws are reliant on deer for sustenance, but it is interesting to consider the probable disparities between the food eaten by literary outlaws and the realities of diet for historical outlaws. Indeed, the focus on food points to a certain 'Land of Cockayne' element, a wishful fantasy of more food, a riotous dream of plenty, which would have been impossible for a real outlaw, as well as for the real lower classes.<sup>402</sup> The dream of feasting would have been equally powerful, however, for the lower gentry, which was obsessed with the possibility of social climbing inherent in feasts and displays of courtesy. So for both types of audience, the outlaws' conspicuous consumption of food expressed their own desires and fantasies, its applicability to multiple social strata simply proof of a wide-ranging appeal. Of course, as in the 'Land of Cockayne' genre, the outlaws' consumption does not remain restrained and orderly, but often spirals out into violence and uncouthness, a process buttressed by the bestial motifs already inherent in the outlaw material.

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<sup>402</sup> Helen Phillips comments on this in her article: Helen Phillips, "'Merry' and 'Greenwood': A History of Some Meanings," in *Images of Robin Hood: Medieval to Modern*, ed. Lois Potter and Joshua Calhoun (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 92.

### *Menace and Trees*

Edward I ordered that the highways be cleared of any low-lying hedge or brush so that nothing, and no one, could lurk therein. It seems a widely-felt fear of ambush led to a change in the laws and a major change in the landscape – as a result of the process beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century with the decrease of wayside shrubbery and concluding in the 14<sup>th</sup> with the most complete mapping and use of the forest, it became significantly less wild and less menacing.<sup>403</sup> But the bestial outlaw became popular before the fearful woodland roads were cleared, and Robin Hood inherits many of his traits, including his habit of haunting shaded roadsides. In his essay on the paradoxes of Robin Hood, Nagy notes that Robin Hood's association with roads also identifies him as a liminal figure, and indeed, the danger of the woods and the uncertainty of the road come together in the menacing figure of Robin Hood and lend new potency to both imaginary spaces.<sup>404</sup> Specifically, Robin Hood leans against trees in wait for his human prey. His attitude of casual waiting, of menacing immobility, is perhaps one of the most powerful and recognizable motifs of his tradition – there is a reason why the expression "Robin Hood in Barnesdale stod" entered the vernacular register of idiomatic phrases and is evidenced in court records and marginalia of manor account books – its suggestive power in hinting at

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<sup>403</sup> See Harry Rothwell, *English Historical Documents 1189-1327* (London : Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1975), 11, 461. But for a refutation of the overstatement of changing landscape, see Oliver Rackham's *Trees and Woodlands in the British Landscape*. London: J.M. Dent, 1993, 166.

<sup>404</sup> See Joseph Falaky Nagy, "The Paradoxes of Robin Hood," in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 413.

wakeful stillness and kinetic restraint in just one line is almost unmatched.<sup>405</sup> When Robin Hood waits for his prey, he rarely stands in the open — he nearly always rests with “his body leaned to a tree,” exemplifying the static menace of the outlaw material. His seeming repose is threatening in its informality, a sign of the gratuitous full-scale violence that waits on a hair-trigger, always pushing to erupt into the narrative. Part of this strain of the medieval Robin Hood legend, too, is the forced courtesy of the proverbial phrase “good even, Good Robin Hood.”<sup>406</sup> In his *Mythic Biography of Robin Hood*, Knight analyzes the “sense of heroic menace” lurking in the early ballads and in proverbs: “a similarly eerie proverb is simply ‘Good even, good Robin Hood,’ which suggests that the speaker is being polite to someone when he has no choice; Joseph Ritson explained the situation as ‘civility extorted by fear.’”<sup>407</sup> Consonant with their habit of leaning unobtrusively against trees is the outlaw band’s uncanny ability to disappear and appear at will. Like creatures of the forest, they can remain hidden in the brush and avoid notice entirely, or they can appear, almost magically, at exactly the moment they wish to be noticed, as in Robin Hood and Guy of Guisbourne: “There were the ware of wight yeoman, / His body leaned to a tree.”<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> See, for example, stanza three of the *Gest*: “Robyn stode in Bernesdale, / And lenyd hym to a tre, / And bi hym stode Littell Johnn, / A gode yeman was he.”

<sup>406</sup> This proverbial phrase first appears in Skelton’s satirical attack on Cardinal Wolsey, “Why Come Ye not to Courte?”

<sup>407</sup> Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: a Mythic Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>408</sup> 24-25: “Then they became aware of a strong yeoman, his body leaned against a tree.”

## *The Greenwood*

The Greenwood inhabited by the outlaws of the late medieval and early modern outlaw material is instantly recognizable. Every surviving ballad and tale opens with a set-piece that orients us in the world of the Greenwood. The leaves are green, the sky is blue, the merry birds sing in an early summer/late spring landscape of joy and solace. As a set formula, this type of opening is absolutely *de rigueur*, regardless of the meaning of the greater work. At times, the ballad-masters include this formula to the detriment of the more menacing tone they are trying to establish, which is an indication of how important they found it to the establishment of a generic indicator. For example, in the case of the disturbing ballad of Robin Hood and Guy of Guisbourne, the description of a merry forest scene at the beginning of the piece seems out of place in a narrative of harrowing violence and mutilation. Perhaps in spite of his intentions, however, the ballad maker's inclusion of this necessary incongruity enhances the ballad, the juxtaposition of Arcadia with hellish brutality pushing the poetic effect into the register of the sublime.

One very important thing to remember is that this idyllic forest of the medieval Greenwood material does not exist. It is an ecological fantasy constructed from dreams and communal memories of an imaginary England. It contrasts with the reality of rural life, where large portions of English countryside had been completely deforested, and other wooded sections were being exploited to their very limit. In his recent study of the Robin Hood material, A.J. Pollard shows the kind of forest that was typical of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and it is nothing like the dense and

inaccessible wilderness it seems to be in the greenwood narratives. A brief look at a typical map of the space shows just how exploited and accessible real forests had become. They were no longer places of mystery, romance, and death, but rather mundane spaces lacking unexplored corners.<sup>409</sup>

The Greenwood, in contrast, is a mythical, literary space, where the processes of nature are allowed to continue undisturbed in every way (except, of course, by the outlaws' depredations). As Richard Tardif puts it, "in the ballads the forest never appears as an extension to agricultural economy, but as a wilderness devoid of social restrictions at the edge of the town."<sup>410</sup> The forests are an aesthetic refuge from real life, but they also harbor atavistic violence and death within their green groves, and indeed, the Greenwood genre depends upon the constant contrast between life and death as represented by the lovely deer and their wolfish predators, the outlaw bands (for they have replaced in the popular imagination the actual wolves that used to dwell in the woods, and they have, for the most part, assumed their previous territory and habitat). A survey of the opening lines of the early Greenwood material confirms the notion of these topoi being summoned into the audience's imagination

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<sup>409</sup> A. J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, 45. See Rackham, *Trees and Woodland*, 39: "By AD 1200 much of the modern landscape was already recognizable. Nearly all our villages and most hamlets existed then the proportions of hamlet, moorland and woodland were not enormously different from what they are now."

<sup>410</sup> Richard Tardif, "The 'Mistery' of Robin Hood: A New Social Context for the Ballads," *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 347.

through the recital of some very familiar oral formulas. Thus begins “Robin Hood and the Monk”:

In somer, when the shawes be sheyne,  
And leves be large and long,  
Hit is full mery in feyre foreste  
To here the foulys song,  
To se the dere draw to the dale,  
And leve the hilles hee,  
And shadow hem in the leves grene,  
Under the grene wode tre.<sup>411</sup>

And thus “Robin Hood and the Potter”:

In schomer, when the leves spryng,  
The bloschoms on every bowe,  
So merey doyt the berdys syng  
Yn wodys merey now.<sup>412</sup>

And “Robin Hood and Guy of Guisborne”:

When shawes beene sheene and shradds full fayre,  
And leeves both large and longe,  
Itt is merry, walking in the fayre forrest,  
To heare the small birds singe.  
The woodweele sang, and wold not cease,  
Amongst the leaves a lyne.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> All citations from primary texts are taken from the most recent edition of the Middle English outlaw material, Stephen Knight, et al. *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 1997) unless otherwise noted. Line numbers and the names of the poems will be cited as such: “Robin Hood and the Monk, 1-8: “In summer, when the woods are bright and the leaves are big and long, it is very merry to hear the birds sing in the fair forest, to see the deer draw to the dae and leave the high hills and shadow themselves under the green leaves, under the Greenwood tree.”

<sup>412</sup> 1-5: “In summer, when the leaves spring, with blossoms on every bough, so merry do the birds sing in the merry woods now.”

<sup>413</sup> 1-6.

These are highly typical of the entire Greenwood corpus; leaves are green, birds sing, the mood is merry – we are ready for an adventure! In an expansion upon the importance of the topos of the Greenwood, Pollard notes that in prose works outside the Greenwood tradition, such as the “Parliament of the Three Ages” and the “Book of Nurture,” the “calling up [of] the Greenwood is an invocation to enter an imagined or dreamed world, an explicit sign that what is to follow is fictional not fact.”<sup>414</sup> So the Greenwood extends beyond the outlaw tradition, but it arguably always maintains that connection.

### *The Wild North*

Like King Arthur in Cornwall and Wales, Robin Hood is located, sometimes generally, sometimes specifically, in the north of England. He and his men haunt three primary forested regions: Barnesdale, Inglewood, and Sherwood. All are mentioned at least once as the centers of the activities of the merry men, and it becomes clear that the specific forest is not as important to the ballad makers as is the *idea* of the north of England. In a parallel with American mythmaking processes, the north of England was not only a specific geographical region to the medieval English, but also a mythical space, much as the American West was and is to modern Americans, and it appears to have performed many of the same functions.

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<sup>414</sup> Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, 75



As Pollard says, "The North is a literary locale," a place of wildness, adventure, and primal drama.<sup>415</sup>

Nottingham appears to have been the right choice for the setting of the conflicts of the Robin Hood cycle due to its position as the final southern town on the way to the North. In the words of Colin Richmond, "Nottingham is society and the sheriff of Nottingham is society's representative. Nottingham is nonetheless an outpost; it is a long way from London and it is on the edge of the Wilderness in which the only Law and Order is that kept by the outlaws."<sup>416</sup> Like the mythic structures of outlaw/frontier/town in the legendary material of the American West, the Robin Hood material offers us frontier mythmaking – the North is a pristine place where the conflict between the wild and the civilized is perpetually played out. It is romantic and undomesticated, and perhaps a little monstrous. Part of the reason for this is that the northern landscape was much less developed than its southern counterpart, and some spaces had yet to be entirely cultivated. Wild beasts, even wolves, could still be encountered from time to time – on a wolf-hunt in Lincoln in 1303-4, eleven of the beasts were killed.<sup>417</sup> One imagines this was one of the last hunts of its kind, for the species became extinct in England by the mid 1300's, but wolves remained an active 'threat' just slightly to the north in Scotland

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>416</sup> Colin Richmond, "An Outlaw and Some Peasants: The Possible Significance of Robin Hood," *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 365.

<sup>417</sup> Pluskowski, *Wolves and Wilderness in the Middle Ages*, 17.

up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when massive official wolf hunts were still organized. This marked difference in types of native fauna would probably have remained an important factor. The North also was a famous hideout for bandits and rebels, and had other, historically ingrained aspects which made it seem 'other.'

One of these was its proximity to Scotland, which, in spite of close sociopolitical ties with England, remained in the English mythic imagination a feared land of savages. By cultural and linguistic association with these Celtic 'barbarians', the North inherited some of its wildness, much as the frontier white settlements gained an aura of savagery due to constant contact with Native American tribes. Moreover, an established rhetoric concerning the danger of savage raids from the north, inherited from the time of the Viking raids, was now applied to the North of England and Scotland, using the time-worn language and imagery of fear and wildness.<sup>418</sup> The north was also a place where older lore could survive in way that it could not further south. Due to vibrant inherited cultural/linguistic folkways, Celtic and Scandinavian material was common in the North of England. Thus, in a way, it was seen as preserving an earlier, wilder time. Such backwardness is at the same time Arcadian and demonic.

### *Splitting the Bestial Outlaw*

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<sup>418</sup> Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, 71. See also the previous chapters of this dissertation which detail earlier texts which explicitly equate the savages at the borders – be they Vikings or Celts – with wolves.

At first glance the case for a bestial or, more specifically, a lupine Robin Hood doesn't appear very hopeful. Robin Hood does not appear to have any animal familiars like his predecessors Hereward and Fulk Fitz Waryn. He is generally refined and refrains from the kind of savage violence we have seen in other outlaw figures, and many other aspects of the tradition that have been previously delineated in these pages seem faint at best when applied to the most famous outlaw of all. In spite of the initial appearance of freedom from a tradition of bestial outlawry, analysis of the early material finds Robin Hood sharing common ground with the bestial outlaws we have already met, although one sometimes must examine his companions to discover those bestial qualities.

Little John in particular displays many of the character traits we have already seen in such heroes as Hereward and we will see in Gamelyn. Interestingly, it appears that the Robin Hood material relies on the *splitting* of the standard outlaw hero into two—one noble and elegant, the other large and uncouth—for its power as a narrative. This splitting is the result of a late development in the bestial outlaw tradition which was uneasy with a hero who was not courtly or refined. Thus the traditional figure was split into a 'courtly' and a 'brutish' outlaw who work together. This solves the narrative dilemma, since the brutish sidekick can display all the bestial characteristics common to the tradition while the courtly leader can maintain the dignity necessary to the later and more idealized iterations of the basic outlaw story. This splitting occurs not only within the corpus of Robin Hood material, but

also in such tales as Fulk Fitz Waryne, where John de Rampaigne does 'the dirty work' for the courtlier hero, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

This 'splitting' process becomes even more common in the later medieval material. In the case of Robin Hood, it appears likely that this process occurred very early in the life of the legend. As Singman notes, Robin Hood's relationship with Little John is "a relationship so prominent both in the stories and in the external references to the legend that it is probably one of the oldest features of the legend."<sup>419</sup> Little John is a necessary part of Robin Hood, and vice versa. Without one another, they lack power as legend.

### ***The Individual Greenwood Ballads***

The previous section of this chapter dealt with the common concerns of the Greenwood material. Now we will turn to the individual poems and examine in more detail the ways in which the bestial outlaw tradition – as identified as a body of in the first chapter of this study – functions within the context of each specific text. The analysis that follows will deal with the Greenwood outlaw tradition broadly defined, which means it will include not only the ballads of Robin Hood, but also other Greenwood narratives like the "Tale of Gamelyn," "Robin and Gandelyn," and even Chaucer's "Friar's Tale." The close studies should show how the established

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<sup>419</sup> Jeffrey Singman, *Robin Hood: The shaping of the legend* (Oxford: Greenwood Publishing, 1998), 36-37.

English tradition of bestial outlawry, as it has been identified in earlier chapters, works in the final medieval iterations of the motif.

### *The Tale of Gamelyn*

“The Tale of Gamelyn,” that unusual popular epic poem that was appended to the *Canterbury Tales*, is a fascinating outlaw story.<sup>420</sup> We can credit Chaucer with the unwitting preservation of the earliest outlaw narrative in English, for had it not been found among his papers, presumably as raw material for a new tale, it may never have survived. Thanks to the *Canterbury Tales*, it is extant in 25 manuscripts, although this is not proof of its inherent popularity.<sup>421</sup>

As a literary work, “The Tale of Gamelyn” has as much or more in common with the *Gesta Herewardi* than with the later Greenwood ballads. In his youth, Gamelyn is, like Hereward, a ‘coal-biter’, or a slowly-developing, rather brutish type of hero. He displays many of the same qualities – berserker-like rage and violent fits, family power struggles, and a propensity towards discord, among other things. Like the *Gesta Herewardi*, “The Tale of Gamelyn” is a product of the former Danelaw and appears to have been part of a vital oral tradition at some point. There are many Scandinavian loan-words present in the poem, and much alliteration. It contains a

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<sup>420</sup> ‘Popular epic poem’ seems the best available generic categorization for this poem, which like the “*Gest of Robin Hood*” is much longer than a ballad.

<sup>421</sup> It is appended to the cd group of MSS as a follow-up to the unfinished “Cook’s Tale”.

preponderance of proverbial phrases and fillers, leading those who have studied it to conclude that it shows marks of an oral tradition.<sup>422</sup>

Like many outlaw narratives, the "Tale of Gamelyn" is concerned with the themes of justice, food, and wildness. As we might expect from a classic outlaw narrative, most of the power struggles between Gamelyn and his older brother revolve around food in a rather prosaic way. For example, Gamelyn appears not to resent the loss of his inheritance to his brother until his brother asks him to cook for him:

Afterward come his brother walking there,  
And seide to Gamelyne, "Is our mete yare?"  
Tho wrathed him Gamelyne and swore by Goddys boke,  
"Thow schalt go bake thi self I wil not be thi coke!"  
"What? brother Gamelyne howe answerst thou now?  
Thou spekest nevere such a worde as thou dost now."  
"By feithe," seide Gamelyne "now me thenketh nede;  
Of al the harmes that I have I toke never yit hede.  
My parkes bene broken and my dere reved,  
Of myn armes ne my stedes nought is byleved"<sup>423</sup>

Gamelyn, like many outlaws, thinks with his stomach; it takes an injustice in the realm of food preparation and consumption to get Gamelyn to think about his life and realize that he has been dispossessed of his lands. I believe it to be significant

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<sup>422</sup> See, for example, Knight and Ohlgren's introduction to this tale, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 186-187. See also chapter three of this dissertation.

<sup>423</sup> 89-98: "Afterwards his brother came walking there and said to Gamelyn, 'Is our meat ready?' Then Gamelyn god mad and swore by the Bible: 'go bake yourself; I won't be your cook!' 'What, brother, how do you answer now? You never spoke such a word as you do now.' 'By faith,' said Gamelyn, 'now it seems needful to me. Of all the harms that I have taken I never paid attention. My parks were broken and my deer stolen, and nothing is left of my arms nor my property.'"

that Gamelyn so pointedly brings up his parks and his populations of animals--this section is written with the Greenwood in mind even before Gamelyn enters it.

Gamelyn's pointed response to his brother, that he 'go bake himself,' is as ambiguous in meaning in Middle English as it is in Modern English -- it can either mean that the brother should bake his own food, or that he ought to bake himself.

Double meanings like this centered around a sort of metaphoric cannibalism abound in late medieval outlaw literature. This passage can be compared with Robin Hood's wish that God send 'such a monk for dinner every day' in the *Gest*. Although the ultimate meaning is prosaic, the ambiguity of syntax highlights the rapaciousness of the speakers and aligns them with predators, and even cannibals, metaphorically.

"The Tale of Gamelyn" is particularly full of these disturbing passages centered around taboos of food consumption.

In a scene that seems closest in tone and content to saga literature, Gamelyn repays his brother's niggardliness by inviting a large number of people to feast from his brother's well-stocked storeroom. The guests are clearly uncomfortable with this unsanctioned use of the older brother's possessions, and they only get more so as Gamelyn gets dangerously drunk and aggressive. He forces them to remain for seven days, and by the end of that time, they desperately want to leave. In the end they are able to beg off:

The Gestes come to Gamelyn and wolde gone her way.  
"Lordes," seide Gamelyn, "will ye so hie?  
Al the wyne is not yit dronke so brouke I myn ye."  
Gamelyn in his herte was ful woo,  
Whan his Gestes toke her leve fro hym for to go;

He wolde thei had dwelled lenger and thei seide nay.<sup>424</sup>

As in saga literature, the tensions and dangers inherent in the dramatic situation are treated with understatement and a certain amount of litotes. Gamelyn's distraught reaction to the guests does not explain their tenacity in leaving the seven day 'party.' Implicit is Gamelyn's hair-trigger anger and fearsome state of vengeful activity – this seems to be what has motivated his guests' insistence on cutting short their enforced stay. Again, the tension and latent violence lying between characters is explored subtly through the theme of feasting. Since feasts would be a time for peace and brotherhood, the lack of these qualities stands out even more starkly than it would in any other social occasion.

Gamelyn is subject to violent rages when provoked, and cannot be stopped, much like many of the other bestial outlaw figures we have encountered. These rages are punctuated by the use of blunt, prosaic weapons that help to emphasize his animality. For example, when Gamelyn first begins to battle his brother, he finds himself surrounded and uses a makeshift weapon – a pestle. This may seem amusingly low-class, but the pestle becomes a brutal and formidable weapon in the hands of Gamelyn, as in the earlier English outlaw literature, the Norse sagas and Old French chansons de geste, where a low-caste toy or household object often

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<sup>424</sup> "The guests came to Gamelyn and asked to go their way. "Lords," said Gamelyn, "will you depart thus? All the wine hasn't been drunk yet, as I use my eye!" Gamelyn in his heart was very distraught when his guests took their leave to go from him. He wanted them to stay longer, but they said no."



becomes lethal in the hands of a precocious warrior youth. Again, we see the bestial hero's taboo combination of blood with food.<sup>425</sup> The pestle Gamelyn uses as his weapon is an instrument of food preparation, and specifically (and probably significantly) a grinder:

Gamelyn was light and thider gan he lepe,  
And droof alle his brotheres men right sone on an hepe  
And loked as a wilde lyon and leide on good wone;  
And whan his brother segh that he byganne to gon;  
He fley up into a loft and shette the door fast;  
Thus Gamelyn with his pestel made hem al agast.<sup>426</sup>

In spite of his comical weapon, Gamelyn quickly turns the game into earnest bloodsport — this is a typical turn in outlaw narratives of this period, which often juxtapose humorous or beautiful passages against the most horrific violence. Importantly, Gamelyn is compared to a wild lion, as the narrator draws his audience's attention to Gamelyn's fierce and bestial qualities.

Fitt Two relates the story of a wrestling match which further emphasizes Gamelyn's extremely physical nature, and again aligns him with all those other bestial heroes who rely on the strength of their hands to aid them in their battles, but who often become somewhat monstrous in the process. Gamelyn meets a distraught Franklin, who is sure his sons will be killed by a wrestler should Gamelyn choose not to interfere. Of course, Gamelyn breaks the monstrous wrestler's back, and frees

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<sup>425</sup> Please see the fourth chapter of this work, which deals with Hereward's food and blood issues, as well as the third chapter, which discusses the fundamental blood taboos established by the Anglo-Saxon fixation on cannibalism.

<sup>426</sup> 123-128.

the two sons. In the notes to their edition, Ohlgren and Knight argue that “this is a version of the knightly rescue of those oppressed by an ogre,” and this study concurs with that opinion.<sup>427</sup> The fitt is confusing when read as an account of a village wrestling match – why would the two sons be in danger? But if read within a larger fantastic tradition, where a typical heroic action – particularly of a monster-killer type of bestial hero – is to rescue victims from violent bestial creatures such as ogres, giants, and berserkers, this passage is more coherent.<sup>428</sup>

Again, Gamelyn is an ambiguous figure who is not entirely heroic because he walks too narrow a borderline; he is a petulant, excessively violent monster-killer who is as a result something of a monster himself. This is arguably the author’s intent in his insertion of Gamelyn’s dialogue, which is simplistic and somewhat obsessive in its range of meaning. For example, Gamelyn is exceptionally spinally-fixated; he mentions backbones, backs and necks a total of eight times, swearing on his own neck in oaths, and commenting upon the backbones of others (usually threateningly). He breaks at least four backs and necks within the short space of 898 lines, most importantly his own brother’s, and most spectacularly and unnecessarily,

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<sup>427</sup> Knight, Ohlgren and Kelly, *Robin Hood and other outlaw tales*, 188.

<sup>428</sup> It seems particularly close to the material of the *forðaldarsögur* and Icelandic saga material where local people are threatened by a particularly aggressive berserker-duelist, who can only be gotten rid of through combat with the hero. See, for example, *Egil’s Saga* for a particularly close comparison. See as well, Hereward’s encounter with *Ulcus Ferreus* and the rapist bear, and Payn Peverel’s fight with the giant zombie in *FFW*.

the gatekeeper's,<sup>429</sup> and it could be argued that spines in general are a strange leitmotif throughout, drawing attention to Gamelyn's monstrous side. Giants, ogres, and bears crack human bones; human warriors seem more likely to wound in more 'civilized' ways. One need only think of the famous folkloric collocations of bones with gianthood – the giant grinds human bones to make his bread, or his bones are crushed on the ground leading to new landforms. He bites into the 'banlocan' or plays mumblety-peg with bones in the mountains. His cave is strewn with bones. He crushes the bones of women when he tries to rape them. One need not take this too far – Gamelyn is not actually a giant – but it does seem likely that the theme of gianthood (closely linked with the bestial outlaw, as we have seen, and will see again in the figure of Little John) lurks behind his obsession with human spines. The audience is fairly likely to pick up on this; the famous giant of Mont St. Michel from the *Brut* tradition was a bonebreaker, and the giant fought in the romance of Sir Eglamour resides in a bone-strewn cave, among many other pertinent examples. In line with this giantlike fixation on bones is Gamelyn's apparent allergy to civilized weapons. Throughout the course of the narrative, he uses his hands, a pestle, and a staff. He hardly ever uses swords but rather chooses the crudest wooden weapons available to him. For example, in the feast scene (discussed in detail below), his civilized sidekick Adam Spencer provides Gamelyn with a staff,

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<sup>429</sup> When the gatekeeper tries to bar Gamelyn's entrance, Gamelyn chases him, breaks his neck, grabs him by the arm, and throws him down a well, 301-304.

even though he has had time to plot and just as easily could have provided the hero with a sword.<sup>430</sup> The bestial hero's preference for his own hands or blunt clubs as weapons is a motif that goes back to Beowulf in English literature, and aligns Gamelyn yet again with that tradition.<sup>431</sup>

In a later episode, the evil older brother manages to trap Gamelyn through treachery (a standard outlaw motif) and has him bound against a beam and held for days without food. Again, the emphasis of the story falls on Gamelyn's bodily needs. The scene also emphasizes Gamelyn's power and strength—he is fearsome even when tied up. It is possible that the audience would have thought of a wild beast entrapped by a wily hunter, especially if connections between Gamelyn and the world of the bestial hero have already been made. Finally, with the help of his crafty ally, Adam Spencer, Gamelyn is secretly untied and yet pretends to be bound during a feast until he suddenly leaps out and begins laying about him with a staff, causing blood to rain on the feast. Especially notable is the morbid metaphor, "Gamelyn spreth holy watere with an oken spire."<sup>432</sup> He is beating corrupt monks and abbots within an inch of their lives, and their blood, the 'holy water,' is spraying all over the feast. Like Hereward or Fulk fitz Waryn, Gamelyn disrupts civilized food consumption with outbursts of disturbing violence. This is one of the

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<sup>430</sup> On a side note, it is interesting and perhaps not insignificant that Adam Spencer embodies the crafty side of the brute/trickster split we see in the later medieval material.

<sup>431</sup> For an analysis of *Beowulf* in light of bestial outlaw motifs, see chapter two.

<sup>432</sup> 499.

fundamental attributes of the figure of the bestial outlaw – he is unable to contain himself and thus he continually breaks taboos against bloodshed and violence at the table, a sacrosanct place for truce and peace. Gamelyn has done this previously, and perhaps more spectacularly, in the section where he throws the gatekeeper in the well, thus contaminating the water supply with human blood and flesh. The gatekeeper's body makes the well unfit to provide fresh water to the people who depend on it, lest they become guilty of the terrible sin of consuming something tainted by dead human flesh.

When Gamelyn is declared a 'wolfys-hed,' he must finally leave his brother's estate where he has been making so much trouble, and flee to the woods.<sup>433</sup>

Although the theme of the bestial outlaw has run deep throughout the narrative, at this point it becomes quite obvious. Gamelyn begins his sojourn in the forest as an outsider to the world of the dark woods, and beyond the obvious references to wolfishness in the declaration of Gamelyn's status as a wolf's head, we learn that Gamelyn is a natural outlaw. The minute he reaches the forest, he moves like one of its inhabitants, stalking quietly through the woods. Again, the word choice echoes the movements of a predatory creature – stalking quietly is not generally a human gait. His sidekick Adam Spencer lacks these qualities and is very disturbed by the dark trees:

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<sup>433</sup> Gamelyn is described as a wolfs-head three times in the narrative in ll. 696, 706, 718.

Gamelyn into the wode stalked stille,  
And Adam Spensere liked right ille;  
Adam swore to Gamelyn, "By Seint Richere,  
Now I see it is mery to be a spencere,  
Yit lever me were kayes to bere,  
Than walken in this wilde wode my clothes to tere." <sup>434</sup>

Spencer's concern is validated when all of a sudden they learn they are not alone in the Greenwood:

As thei stode talkinge bothen in fere,  
Adam herd talking of men and right nyghe hem thei were.  
Tho Gamelyn under wode looked aright,  
Sevene score of yonge men he seye wel ydight. <sup>435</sup>

Luckily for the two outlaws, they are welcomed to dinner by the well-armed group of outlaws, and they meet their leader, the Outlaw King.

It is not clear whether the Outlaw King who rules these merry men is meant to be Robin Hood, but he does seem to be a well-known popular figure regardless of his moniker. The audience would surely have appreciated finding themselves in slightly different generic terrain, and seeing the two legends interact, somewhat like the way modern audiences appreciate a fictional meeting of Dracula and Frankenstein. In collision, two closely related genres, the bestial hero and the greenwood outlaw, yield new and interesting results, and the storyteller finds

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<sup>434</sup> 613-617: "Gamelyn stalked quietly into the wood, and Adam Spencer did not like it at all. Adam swore to Gamelyn, "By Saint Richard, now I see it is merry to be a spencer. I would much rather bear keys than walk in this wild wood and tear my clothes."

<sup>435</sup> "As they both stood talking together Adam heard some men talking and they were very near. Then Gamelyn looked through the woods and saw 7 score of men well-armed."

himself in the enviable position of playing with assumptions and expectations. The outlaw king's crown points to the kind of summer festivals involving the crowning of a May King and Queen, often called Robin and Marian, that were attached to this figure later, and this could even be a very early reference to this seasonal game.<sup>436</sup>

Gamelyn becomes accustomed to and even drawn towards forest life, as can be expected from his nature as presented previously. He was, as the audience knows well from his juvenile adventures and brutish tendencies, born to be a renegade. This expectation was built implicitly throughout the tale through repetition of the basic themes of the bestial outlaw tradition; fixation on food, eruptions of excessive violence, identification with beasts, not humans, and exile in a wild space. In conclusion, Gamelyn is a liminal figure who marks a transitional phase between the old bestial outlaw and the new hero of the Greenwood. His character encompasses both traditions in very intriguing ways, but his bestial nature unifies what could otherwise seem like a fragmentary, odd narrative which juxtaposes two very different types of story – that of the outlawed manorial lord and that of the wild man in the woods.

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<sup>436</sup> David Wiles, "Robin Hood as Summer Lord," in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 77-98.

### *Robyn and Gandelyn*

The ballad, or more accurately, lyric, of “Robyn and Gandelyn” exists in only one MS, Sloane 2593 in the British Library, which is an anthology of lyrics and carols compiled around 1450. Like other cryptic and moving lyrics found in the collection such as the “Corpus Christi Carol,” it is uncanny and very beautiful. It seems likely that it was sung, and one can only wonder what kind of melody would support the hypnotic lyric. One of the more menacing and nightmarish of all the early Greenwood material, which already tends in that direction, “Robyn and Gandelyn” has led many critics down the thorny path of mythological interpretation, and with good reason. As with the Outlaw King in the “Tale of Gamelyn,” it is unclear whether the character named Robyn is meant to be Robin Hood the outlaw. Other viable possibilities include the pastoral Robin of the tradition of “Robin et Marion” and the puckish Robin Goodfellow. But the coincidence of two figures, one named Robyn and the other Gandelyn, along with the arrow shootings and dismal hunt motif, do seem to land it squarely in the world of the Greenwood.<sup>437</sup> The lingering possibility of other identifications for the Robin figure only points towards the perpetual slippage between the genres of fairy story, romance, moral fable, and pastoral in the outlaw material.

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<sup>437</sup> Also, the enemy Wrennock seems to correspond with the Wrennock who appears in *FFW*.



The lyric opens with the cryptic “Robin lay ibunden” which shares a poetic resonance with another lyric in the Sloane Anthology, “Adam lay ibunden,” cited here:

Adam lay ibunden,  
Bounden in a bond;  
Foure thousand winter  
Thowt he not too long.  
And all was for an appil,  
An appil that he took,  
As clerkes finden wreten  
In here book.  
Ne hadde the appil take ben,  
The appil taken ben,  
Ne hadde never our lady  
A ben hevene quen.  
Blissed be the time  
That appil take was!  
Therfore we moun singen  
“Deo gracias!”<sup>438</sup>

Perhaps the master of “Robyn and Gandelyn” knew the other lyric, and drew upon its effective diction and structure to enhance his own composition. In both lyrics, the line “[ ] lay ibunden” establishes a mood of foreboding, since we now know that our subjects have died, and that we may see them do so before the song is through. To introduce the theme of death even before any exposition is to create a sense of looming fate throughout the cryptic lyrics. This is another characteristic of the

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<sup>438</sup> Text cited from Maxwell Luria and Richard Hoffmann, eds., *Middle English Lyrics* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1974. “Adam lay bound in a shroud/band; he thought four thousand winters not too long. And all was for an apple, and apple that he took, as clerks can find written in their book (Bible). If the apple had not been taken, then our Lady would never have been queen of heaven. May that time when the apple was be blessed! Therefore let us sing, ‘Thanks be to God!’”

outlaw tradition at its most elemental, as I have argued in the introductory chapter of this dissertation – outlaws are doomed figures, ‘born’ into their woodland habitats only to ‘die,’ either by capture and execution, starvation, or, occasionally, rehabilitation.

Both lyrics deal with the taking of something that was forbidden; in the lyric, we learn of Adam’s suffering that “All was for an appil,” and similarly, Robyn dies because he has shot an unblemished deer. However, the mitigating circumstances of *felix culpa*, so well explored in the religious lyric, are absent from the Greenwood ballad, and their absence deprives it of the other poem’s ultimately comforting message. The lyric of ‘Robyn and Gandelyn’ begins with the two outlaws going hunting:

Robynn lyth in grene wode bowndyn.  
I herde a carpyng of a clerk,  
Al at yone wodes ende,  
Of gode Robyn and Gandeleyne;  
Was ther non other gyng.  
Stronge thevys wer tho chylderin non,  
But bowmen gode and hende;  
He wentyn to wode to getyn hem fleych,  
If God wold it hem sende.  
Al day wentyn tho chylderin too,  
And fleych fowndyn he non,  
Til it were ageyn evyn;  
The chylderin wolde gon hom.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> 1-13: “Robin lies in a shroud in the Greenwood. I heard the ‘singing/shouting’ of a clerk, at the end of yonder wood, about good Robin and Gandelyn; there was no other outing. These two men were no strong thieves but rather good and skilled bowmen. They went to the wood to get

The search for meat lends an obvious predatory tone, which the diction does nothing to dispel. The ballad-master could have euphemized the outlaws' errand by utilizing the codified language of the hunt and deemphasizing their bloodthirstiness, but he does not. Hungry, perhaps ravenous, the two companions search for flesh. This again shows that the outlaw tradition tends toward animality, a movement downwards, not upwards, in terms of civilization. The outlaws search in vain for the meat all day, until the liminal time of evening, a magical time between day and night, when otherworldly things can happen. Suddenly:

Half an honderid of fat falyf der  
He comyn ayon,  
And alle he wern fayr and fat inow,  
But markyd was ther non;  
"Be dere God," seyde gode Robyn,  
"Here of we shul have on."<sup>440</sup>

These deer appear suddenly, and they are perfect in form and appearance. This motif is also common in romance and dream vision, and its significance would not have been lost upon its original audience. The magic deer are a trope of fantastic literature in the Middle English period, appearing in many works including Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*. Their function is in part to lend a sense of otherworldliness to the action, often in contrast with the greater drama of the piece. For example, in *The Book of the Duchess*, their image of fecundity and plenty serves as

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some flesh, if God would send it to them. All the day the two wandered and they found no meat, until it was nearly evening, and they wanted to go home.

<sup>440</sup> 14-19: They came suddenly upon 50 fat fallow deer, and all were fair and fat enough, but none were marked. "By dear God," said Robin, "We'll have one of those."

a sharp contrast to the deep, life-denying mourning of the Man in Black. In “Robyn and Gandelyn”, Robin is fated to die; in both examples, the teeming deer are supernatural symbols of life juxtaposed against the inevitable forces of death. They also function paradoxically as a ‘sign’ of that death.

It seems likely that the deer are not meant to be killed; they are in the same category, as Rosalind Field has argued, as Helios’ holy kine in the *Odyssey*, and it seems that the audience is meant to see the killing of the largest and fattest of the herd not only as a sign of greed, but as a sin against some numinous power, and as a very bad omen. As Rogers notes in her comprehensive survey of the theme of the dismal hunt in Pan-European balladry, “an animal, usually an elusive deer, is in many European ballads something more than it seems to the hunter who begins to chase it.” This elusive deer is, she argues, nearly always a harbinger of death.<sup>441</sup> Sure enough, Robin is summarily killed by an arrow as he works to flay his forbidden prize:

He hadde not the der iflawe,  
Ne half out of the hyde,  
There cam a schrewde arwe out of the west,  
That felde Robertes pryde<sup>442</sup>

This lack of chivalry and sportsmanship displayed on the part of Robin’s hunter, Wrennok, points to Robin’s status as a Wolf’s-head, as well as to the sense that this is

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<sup>441</sup> Rogers, *The Perilous Hunt*, 22.

<sup>442</sup> 24-27: He hadn’t flayed the deer halfway out of its hide when a sharp arrow came out of the west that felled Robert’s pride.” Robin is a diminutive of Robert.

somehow the *right* punishment for Robyn's transgression. As Thiébaux argues, sometimes in a literary hunt, "the encounter with the quarry...may lead to the dissolution of [the hero's] former or human identity, perhaps the loss of his life. The hunter himself becomes the hunt's object; he, not the quarry, is sacrificed. Failing to survive the crisis to which the hunt has brought him, he is annihilated in the act."<sup>443</sup> In an outlaw narrative, this logic can be pushed a step further, since his humanity has already been compromised, it is only a matter of time before he loses his diminished, animalistic life as well. The human laws of fair play do not apply when one deals with an outlaw, whose life is, by definition, no more precious than a wolf's. Robin is caught in the act of preying upon a deer, and he is dispatched like a beast.

Beyond the uncanny deer, the supernatural atmosphere established by this ballad master is sustained by the sudden appearance of the previously unseen slayer of Robin. Gandelyn looks about wildly for his companion's killer and sees nothing, until, Cheshire Cat-like, Wrennok of Donne suddenly appears, *standing under a tree*. This sort of disappearing and appearing act is characteristic of the protagonists of these tales, as we have already seen in the "Tale of Gamelyn," and it serves to prove the almost inhuman stealth of these violent wood-dwellers, as I have already noted.

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<sup>443</sup> Marcelle Thiébaux, *The stag of love; the chase in medieval literature* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1974).

Gandelyn speaks with this mysterious hunter and declares he will be avenged for Robin's death through a contest with Wrennok:

"Wher-at shal oure marke be?"  
Seyde Gandeleyne.  
"Everyche at otheris herte,"  
Seyde Wrennok ageyn.<sup>444</sup>

The two face off with bow and arrow in an early version of a shootout – with each other as the prey. Their deadly showdown results in the ambiguous castration – the arrow goes through the loin area of his pants, and touches 'neither thigh' – of

Gandelyn and the death of Wrennok:

Wrennok schette a ful good schote,  
And he schet not to hye;  
Throw the samclothis of his bryk,  
It towchyd neyther thye.  
Gandeleyne bent his goode bowe,  
And set ther in a flo;  
He schet throw his grene certyl,  
His herte he clef on too.<sup>445</sup>

A heart for a heart, all for a hart – justice is served, and Robin is avenged. Wrennock, previously the hunter, becomes the prey, and poetic justice closes the circle; where before, Robyn cleft the heart 'a to' of "the fattest der of alle," now Gandelyn does the same to his human quarry. But Gandelyn seems most satisfied that bad fame will never be spread about Robin after his death:

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<sup>444</sup> 48-51: "Where shall we aim our marks" asked Gandelyn. "Each at the other's heart," replied Wrennock.

<sup>445</sup> 56-59, 64-67.

"Now shalt thou never yelp, Wrennok,  
At ale ne at wyn,  
That thou hast slawe goode Robyn,  
And his knave Gandeleyne.  
"Now shalt thou never yelp, Wrennok,  
At wyn ne at ale,  
That thou hast slawe goode Robyn,  
And Gandeleyne his knave."<sup>446</sup>

And then the lyric ends with a reiteration of the cryptic first line, "Robin lay ibunden," reminding us of Robin's death and washing away Gandelyn's grim victory.

The fact that "Gandelyn and Robyn" remains a mystery is a testament to its great artistic merit. Some sort of supernatural power lurks behind the ballad, perhaps just fate, although it remains impossible to put one's finger on what is exactly at stake here, or why it is so strangely moving. It does seem possible to say, with the help of comparison with other material pertinent to the Bestial Outlaw tradition, that the savagery and dark resonance of the lyric owes some of its power to its inheritance.

### *Robin Hood and Guy of Guisbourne*

If "Gandelyn and Robyn" is an enigma, so too is its closest relative, the disturbing ballad of "Robin Hood and Guy of Guisbourne." This ballad was

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<sup>446</sup> 68-75: "Now you will never brag, Wrennock, at ale or wine, that you have slain good Robin and his servant Ganelyn. Now you will never brag, Wrennock, at wine or ale, that you have slain good Robin and his servant Ganelyn."

recorded in the famous Percy MS toward the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but it seems to be an earlier ballad.<sup>447</sup> Child saw it as very early indeed, and others have conservatively affirmed that it does seem to be medieval.<sup>448</sup> Part of the reason for this must be the rawness of the poem. It does not seem consonant at all with the early modern Robin Hood material, which consistently gentrifies and euphemizes the more violent figure we see in the earlier ballads. This particular Robin Hood is the most brutal of a brutal bunch, and it seems that critics have been loath to place him in the company of the courtly gentlemen who populate the later material. I will not argue with their attribution of this ballad. Indeed, the elements of inhuman violence certainly confirm their hypothesis, as the earlier in the bestial outlaw tradition we travel, the rawer it gets, with few exceptions.

In this ballad, as in many others, the action centers around a hostile force methodically hunting for an exiled hero. Here, Guy of Guisborne, an elite mercenary, is hired by the sheriff to hunt down and kill Robin Hood. Guy of Guisborne is a frightening, almost demonic figure — he wears a horse's hide, head, and tail on his body to track down his prey.<sup>449</sup>

*There were the ware of wight yeoman,  
His body leaned to a tree.  
A sword and a dagger he wore by his side,*

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<sup>447</sup> British Library, Add MSS 27879.

<sup>448</sup> See D.C. Fowler, "Ballads," in *The Manual of Writings in Middle English 1050-1550*, ed. A. E. Hartung (New Haven, Connecticut: Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1980), 1753-1808.

<sup>449</sup> It may be interesting to compare this demonic forester with the other, more famous demonic forester, the devil in green in "The Friar's Tale."



Had beene many a mans bane,  
And he was cladd in his capull-hyde,  
Topp, and tayle, and mayne.<sup>450</sup>

This is singular and strange, and one can't help but wonder if Guy draws some sort of power from his bestial disguise. His odd wearing of the horse's hide, head and tail hints at magic and ritual, as many critics have commented, and it certainly makes the conflict between the two seem much more elemental and bestial. When Robin Hood is walking alone in a forest, he suddenly comes upon Guy of Gisbourne, and the mercenary is standing with "his body leaned to a tree." Again, this adversary appears suddenly: the ever-watchful Robin Hood and Little John somehow miss this opponent until they suddenly become aware of him, menacingly leaning against a tree – that is, mirroring the outlaws' own iconic stance. This is an example of the static menace of the outlaw material that was elucidated by Richard Firth Green. His seeming repose is threatening in its informality, a sign of the gratuitous full-scale violence that waits on a hair-trigger, always pushing to erupt into the narrative.

After the two fight to the death and Robin Hood has killed Sir Guy with his Irish hunting knife – again, note the way Guy is dispatched with the tools one uses to cut the jugular of wounded quarry – Robin Hood performs a strange and violent ritual mutilation:

He tooke Sir Guys head by the hayre,  
And sticked itt on his bowes end:

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<sup>450</sup> 25-30, italics mine.

"Thou hast beene traytor all thy liffe,  
Which thing must have an ende."  
Robin pulled forth an Irish kniffe,  
And nicked Sir Guy in the face,  
That hee was never on a woman borne  
Cold tell who Sir Guye was.<sup>451</sup>

Robin Hood mutilates his imposing enemy's face beyond recognition and leaves it to rot it on a spike. Richard Firth Green has argued that this is an inversion of the legal system of the time which mutilated the heads of criminals and left them on poles as a warning against illegal activity. Robin Hood, he argues, does unto Sir Guy as Sir Guy would have done unto him.<sup>452</sup> But Robin Hood's "nicking" of his enemy's face registers on several other planes of interpretation as well. First, his mutilation of Guy beyond human recognition is a classic example of the fate of those who die in exile.<sup>453</sup> Guy of Guisborne is denied proper burial and left to carrion creatures – the worst fate possible for a human body. According to this primal logic, he chose to deny his humanity when he wore that horse's skin, and now Robin Hood has given him a fitting reward – an obscure, unnoticed death without funeral rites.

Finally, when considering this episode in conjunction with that strange hide outfit and horse's head, one is compelled to wonder whether this may be a direct

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<sup>451</sup> 163-170: "He took Sir Guy's head by the hair, and stuck it on his bow's end. "You have been a traitor all your life, and this must come to an end." Robin pulled forth an Irish knife and nicked Sir Guy in the face, so that no one born of woman could tell who Sir Guy was."

<sup>452</sup> Richard Firth Green, "Violence in the Early Robin Hood Poems," in *'A Great Effusion of Blood?': Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Mark Douglas Meyerson, Daniel Thiery and Oren Falk (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 277.

<sup>453</sup> I explored this fear in some depth in Chapter Two.

result of the composition of the work in Barnesdale in Yorkshire, where the lore of the old Danelaw may have held on into the later Middle Ages. The wearing of the horse's hide looks quite like the kind of ritual practiced by heroes in Norse literature to either shapeshift or to gain magical power or fighting ability. In this context, the nicking of Guy of Guisborne's face looks almost like a transference of another common action in Old Norse material – the carving of magical symbols onto an object in order to perform some sort of sorcery. One analogue would be Egil Skallagrímsson's carving a horse's head with runes and sticking it on a pole as a potent incantation against his enemies.<sup>454</sup> This *níðstöng* is meant to curse his enemies and blight their land, and it does its job well for Egil. Similarly in this ballad, Robin Hood returns to the sheriff wearing the horse's hide with the intent to take his revenge only to find Little John captured. Perhaps his curse has worked, however, since things go horribly wrong for the sheriff after that. He is finally killed by Little John, who uses one of Guy of Gisborne's bloody arrows (apparently he was such an animal he didn't keep his arrows clean) to shoot him through the heart as he flees:

But John tooke Guyes bow in his hand  
His arrowes were rawstye by the roote;

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<sup>454</sup> Hann tók í hönd sér heslistöng ok gekk á bergsnös nökkura, þá er vissi til lands inn. Þá tók hann hrosshöfuð ok setti upp á stöngina. Síðan veitti hann formála ok mælti svá: "Hér set ek upp níðstöng, ok sný ek þessu níði á hönd Eiríki konungi ok Gunnhildi dróttningu," - hann sneri hrosshöfðinu inn á land, - "sný ek þessu níði á landvættir þær, er land þetta byggva, svá at allar fari þær villar vega, engi hendi né hitti sitt inni, fyrr en þær reka Eirík konung ok Gunnhildi ór landi." Síðan skýtr hann stönginni niðr í bjargrifu ok lét þar standa. Hann sneri ok höfðinu inn á land, en hann reist rúnar á stöngina, ok segja þær formála þenna allan. *Egils saga skallagrímssons*, taken from [http://www.sagadb.org/egils\\_saga.on\\_](http://www.sagadb.org/egils_saga.on_)

The sherriffe saw Litle John draw a bow  
And fettle him to shoote.  
Towards his house in Nottingham  
He fled full fast away,  
And soe did all his companye,  
Not one behind did stay.  
But he cold neither soe fast goe,  
Nor away soe fast runn,  
But Litle John, with an arrow broade,  
Did cleave his heart in twinn.<sup>455</sup>

Even if this notion of a scorn-pole is speculative, Norse lore does seem to influence the action of this ballad. At the beginning of the narrative, Robin Hood has a dream that he has been attacked, and is inclined to take it seriously:

"And it is by two wight yeoman,  
By deare God, that I meane.  
"Me thought they did mee beate and binde,  
And tooke my bow mee froe;  
If I bee Robin a-live in this lande,  
Ile be wrocken on both them towe."<sup>456</sup>

This kind of prophetic dream is common in Norse material, as is Little John's response:

"Sweavens are swift, master," quoth John,  
"As the wind that blowes ore a hill,  
For if itt be never soe lowde this night,

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<sup>455</sup> 223-234: "But John took Guy's bow in his hand — his arrows were rusty by the root. The sheriff saw Little John draw a bow and prepare to shoot. Toward his house in Nottingham he fled away, and so did all his company — not one stayed behind. But he could not run away fast enough, for Little John, with a broad arrow, cleft his heart in two."

<sup>456</sup> 7-12: "I am talking about two strong yeomen, by dear God. It seemed to me that they beat and bound me, and took my bow away; If am Robin, alive in this land, I'll be avenged on them both."

To-morrow it may be still."<sup>457</sup>

In the Norse literary tradition, convention dictates that if one person should have a prophetic dream, either he or his confidant will willfully ignore it, marking himself as fey.<sup>458</sup> An audience accustomed to this motif would immediately recognize the signs of danger – one or both of the protagonists is going to be in grave trouble. And sure enough, Little John's willful disregard of the dream's message results in his being bound and beaten by the sheriff's men, according to the logic of fate, *in place of Robin Hood*. According to the same logic, it is significant that Little John's weapon fails him at the crucial moment, marking and chastizing his moral failure. Luckily, he is able to make good use of Guy of Guisbourne's weapon instead. These ballads I have outlined have all been dark, brooding compositions that feature bestial protagonists and enemies who fall very much in line with the bestial outlaw tradition as I have identified it in this and previous chapters. We now will turn to a medieval text which is, in many ways, an exception to the rule.

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<sup>457</sup> "'Dreams are fast [fleeting?], master" said John, "Like the wind that blows over a hill, for even if it is ever so loud at night, in the morning all will be still."

<sup>458</sup> See for example *Volsungasaga* and *Njála*, as well as T.D. Hill's analysis of dreams in "Perchta the Bellyslitter." Of course, the tale-type of the disregarded prophetic dream is not limited to Norse material; Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale" offers a famous ME example in Pertelote, the hen who tells her husband Chauncleer to ignore his premonitory dream of the fox.

### *The Gest of Robin Hood*

Printed in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the *Gest of Robin Hood* is a generic puzzle. It is certainly not a typical ballad, although it retains the rhyming structure and simplicity of the form. Ohlgren and Knight claim that it is unpoetic in "the diction and the type of imagery offered. The language is limited in vocabulary and range, and most striking of all, there are very few images or even descriptions in the whole poem."<sup>459</sup> J.B. Bessinger argues that the *Gest* "exists in a limbo somewhere just outside the heroic mode, in a cloud of ambiguous and conflicting definitions."<sup>460</sup> It has many of the qualities of an epic: oral, narrative, non-sentimental, male-focused, and integrating didactic and elegiac modes. Bessinger also notes that the *Gest* is a close relative of such romances as *Havelock* and *Gamelyn*. In other words, it is neither fish nor fowl, and ignored by many, although Fowler defends the *Gest* in his "Rymes of Robin Hood:" "To say that 'a *Gest of Robin Hood*' is merely a stringing together of such tales is unfortunate, since it fails to recognize the poem's remarkable unity and above all its narrative symmetry."<sup>461</sup> Other critics of this ballad have argued that this work is a haphazard weaving together of disparate ballads to create a longer 'epic ballad'. The different ballads, they argue, are thematically diverse and don't really

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<sup>459</sup> Holt has this to say of the ballad's coherence: "the poem is episodic in structure and the links between the episodes are sometimes very artificial." He also argues against Fowler's assertion that the ballad is the work of a skilled artist by saying that only applies to the knight's part of the tale (*Robin Hood*, 17-22).

<sup>460</sup> J. B. Bessinger Jr., "The Gest of Robin Hood Revisited," in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 43.

<sup>461</sup> David C. Fowler, "Rymes of Robin Hood" in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), 65.

seem to hang together as a unit. But if one takes into consideration the 'feast under duress with a perverse host' motif, which highlights the tensions between rapacity and courtesy that are the focus of the *Gest*, a different pattern emerges.

### *Food and Feasting*

The *Gest*'s narrative centers on the act of eating from the very first quatrains. Unlike the other early Robin Hood ballads, it focuses much more intensely on notions of courtesy, and especially the sharing of a meal, than on the other concerns of the Robin Hood material – namely violence, life in the Greenwood, and the fate of a doomed hero. According to my count, approximately 202 out of 1824 lines speak directly of food.<sup>462</sup> That means that at least twelve percent of the poem is preoccupied with eating. Robin Hood, echoing King Arthur, refuses to allow his men to eat until they've had an adventure and brought a 'guest' to dinner. Several major sections of the story deal with the kidnapping or coercion of cooks and cellarers, and of course, Robin's men always subject their "guests" to a feast at their home under the greenwood tree. The *Gest* subversively problematizes the politics of feasting by focusing on the darker underside of displays of feasting, thus creating a complex work of social literature.

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<sup>462</sup> See Bessinger, "The Gest of Robin Hood Revisited," 39.

Robin refuses to allow his band of men to eat until he should have “som bolde baron, / or som uncouth gest”<sup>463</sup> at his table. Many have rightly pointed out that this is a direct echo, and probably a parody, of King Arthur’s habit of refusing to allow anyone to eat until “hym deuised were/of sum auenturus pyng an vncoupe tale.”<sup>464</sup> Robin Hood takes this irritating habit to the farthest extreme, refusing to allow anyone to eat until he has heard *three* masses *and* found some uncouth guest to join him at his meal. Moreover, he appears to follow this strict schedule every day, not only on holidays, like the ‘childish’ King Arthur of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. His men, more earthy souls, do not appreciate Robin Hood’s pretensions, as his second in command, Little John, impatiently makes clear, “Maister, and ye wolde dyne betyme / It wolde doo you moche gode.”<sup>465</sup> The absurd overstatement and showmanship of Robin’s mealtime obsession, and the intriguing way that it calls out Arthurian Romance, distracts one from noticing that this opening introduces the audience to the primary thematic thread that runs through the entire narrative, tying together diverse episodes: the ethics of feasting. It is telling that Robin Hood appears to have beaten the greatest British king at his own game of courtesy; Robin Hood will repeatedly prove to be the best-mannered host of all time in this tale, showing up all manner of distinguished guests in flamboyant fashion.

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<sup>463</sup> 23-24.

<sup>464</sup> “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” from *Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, eds. R.A. Waldron and M. Andrew (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996). See also King Arthur’s behavior in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*.

<sup>465</sup> 19-20.



Luckily for Robin's long-suffering men, a guest who meets the description does show up, a kindly knight who cries when he is forced to dine with Robin although he answers cordially enough, following the strict rules dictated by an invitation:

"I graunte," he sayde, "with you to wende,  
My bretherne, all in fere;  
My purpos was to have dyned to day  
At Blith or Dancastere." <sup>466</sup>

Little John has treated the knight with exaggerated courtliness,

"Welcom be thou to grene wode,  
Hende knyght and fre;  
My maister hath abiden you fastinge,  
Syr, al these oures thre." <sup>467</sup>

This courtliness serves only to heighten the apparent irony of the situation: one does not expect outlaws to willingly fast, nor does one ever wish to be welcomed into an outlaw's lair. But Little John, although he relishes playing games with his victims, is telling the truth; Robin Hood *has* awaited the knight fasting. Little John is here performing the role of the perverse host, who tells no lies, but rather twisted truths, embodying the demonic trickster ideal.

No Spartan meal this; after the knight and Robyn have "washed togeder and wiped bothe" they sit down:

"Brede and wyne they had right ynoughe,

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<sup>466</sup> 105-108.

<sup>467</sup> 97-100.

And noumbles of the dere.  
Swannes and fessauntes they had full gode,  
And foules of the ryvere;  
There fayled none so litell a birde  
That ever was bred on bryre."<sup>468</sup>

This is a feast fit for a king, an elaborate procession of all sorts of birds and wines, a calculated display designed as much for intimidation as for entertainment. The outlaws' conspicuous consumption of all the creatures of the English woodland, river, and lake echoes historical feasts, where nearly every edible beast in land or water is consumed as a display of power. Needless to say, it is a long way off from the starvation or raw meat consumption of other ballads like "Johnny Cock" or "Robin and Gandelyn." Accordingly, it makes the knight unsure what game he is playing, so he falls back on some impeccable manners. He thanks Robin:

"Gramarcy, sir," sayde he,  
"Such a dinere had I nat  
Of all these wekys thre."

And, not to be outdone by an outlaw, he promises:

"If I come ageyne, Robyn,  
Here by thys contré,  
As gode a dyner I shall the make  
As that thou haest made to me."<sup>469</sup>

Then, of course, Robin and Little John demand money from the Knight, who proves to have none, having spent it all on a prodigal son. They take pity on him and lend

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<sup>468</sup> 127-132.

<sup>469</sup> 134-140.

him enough money to pay back the abbot, who lent him some a year ago and is eagerly waiting for the knight to default so he can seize all his property. So this feast's tension is diffused by truthful behavior and good manners; it will not go so smoothly again.

This motif of the feast under duress is repeated multiple times throughout the *Gest*: the sheriff, monk, and even King Edward are all courteously escorted to the outlaw's hideout, treated with exaggerated respect and courtliness, then beaten and robbed. This, of course, is a motif of the Robin Hood legend that has flourished because it highlights Robin Hood's *courtly* qualities. As Robin Hood moved into the modern period, and became an actual member of the nobility, albeit disenfranchised, the theme emphasized his princely attributes. But the Robin of the *Gest* is no nobleman. He is a yeoman, but he behaves like a prince. He has attained kingly status in his own microcosm, and when anyone else enters his world – even King Edward – he is subject to Robin's imperious hospitality. Robin Hood's courtliness in this narrative has been noted previously, but it is important to note that in spite of this gentlemanly behavior, the bestial outlaw's characteristic violence still lurks beneath.

A feast is the ultimate celebration of companionship in the medieval world, but Robin's feasts, for all their courtliness, are always a bit *off*, because the threat of violence, robbery, and even death lurks underneath all the revelry. Again, this is a feature of the carnivalesque element in these ballads. What's important to note for the sake of this analysis is the way that feasting highlights interpersonal and social

tensions better than almost any social setting can. It provides a standard rubric with which to analyze the behavior of each character and recognize either his failings or strengths. It also sublimates the fundamental rapacity of the outlaws. Robin's playing at King Arthur tells us that he is more than a little affected, and perhaps suffers from delusions of grandeur. The knight's reaction to being taken prisoner is ever courtly, even though he believes his life to be in danger, so we can recognize his nobility quickly, and no further character exposition is necessary. As we shall soon see, the Sherriff's rudeness in forgetting to provide for Little John's creature comforts leads to his betrayal. As the feasts multiply throughout the poem, it becomes clear that the feast motif is a powerful sign in the *Gest*, one of those ballad shorthands that provide a great deal of social and emotional information in very little space. All of the otherwise diverse episodes contain feasts. The author — or compiler — interweaves these separate narratives using the "meanwhile back at the ranch" technique, leaving one plot *in media res* to turn to another story for a while. This, many claim, is the only way the compiler could make the *Gest* a cohesive poem. But each of these separate narratives centers around feasting in some way, thus tying in with the whole narrative more completely than has been previously noted. The author of the ballad uses repeated feasts as a centering device for a rather sprawling narrative, as well as a way to contrast and easily discern good from bad.

When the knight receives Robin's loan, he immediately goes to the abbey to repay the usurious Abbot. But the abbot, in contrast to Robin Hood, gives the knight no courteous welcome. Instead, he rudely continues to feast without even inviting

the knight to sit. Again, the Abbot, like Robin, is in the power position (or at least thinks he is) but, unlike Robin, he does not affect courtesy. He performs rapacious hostility through his inhospitable behavior. The knight minds his manners even when confronted with treachery, and kneels before the abbot, but the abbot minds no social code. Instead of greeting the knight and inviting him to dine, he immediately demands money: "Hast thou brought my pay?" After a lengthy exchange in which the abbot shows his greed and habits of preying upon his 'flock,' the knight eventually reproves the abbot for his rude behavior: "To suffre a knyght to knele so longe,/Thou canst no curteysye."<sup>470</sup>

The knight's reprimand of the abbot for his manners is echoed later in the *Gest*, in another episode which many have seen as an interpolation from another ballad. Robin and his men waylay a rich monk, invite him to dinner, and then 'charge' him for it by taking everything he has. The monk is indignant about their bad manners:

"By Our Lady," than sayd the monke,  
"That were no curteysye,  
"To bydde a man to dyner,  
And syth hym bete and bynde."  
"It is our olde maner," sayd Robyn,  
"To leve but lytell behynde."  
The monke toke the hors with spore,  
No lenger wolde he abyde:  
"Aske to drynke," than sayd Robyn,  
"Or that ye forther ryde."

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<sup>470</sup> 459-460.

"Nay, for God," than sayd the monke,  
"Me reweth I cam so nere;  
For better chepe I myght have dyned  
In Blythe or in Dankestere."  
"Grete well your abbot," sayd Robyn,  
"And your pryour, I you pray,  
And byd hym send me such a monke  
To dyner every day."<sup>471</sup>

Here again, the monk takes exception not only to Robin's stealing his money, but also to his poor courtesy in 'inviting' him to dinner, then beating him and charging him for it. In the monk's mind, Robin has broken a taboo by so carelessly disregarding the rules of etiquette; it is, in fact, quite impolite to invite a man to dinner and then beat him! The monk's pointed observation cuts through the courtly veneer Robin and his men have been at such pains to maintain and exposes the game for what it is. Robin's response is also menacingly ambiguous. When he reminds his 'guest' that it is the outlaws' long custom to leave but little behind, one wonders whether – like Gamelyn when he tells his brother to 'go bake himself' – he is referring to the food on the table, the monk's money, or the monk himself, who has been all but devoured by the rapacious outlaws, and is not yet out of danger. This context must remain at the surface for the audience, since Robin Hood and his band almost always refer to their prey as "fat-headed munke[s]," a class of prey whose fleshiness and stupidity singles them out to be culled like beasts of the

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<sup>471</sup> 1023-1040.

field.<sup>472</sup> This notion of a sort of cannibalism is reinforced with Robin Hood's request that the abbot send him a similar monk to dinner every day. Again, the diction is deliberately unclear. Does he mean as a guest, or as a meal? Again, though, this 'cannibalism' is larded with double-meanings and puns – like Gamelyn when he 'sprays holy water' on the feast or Fulk Fitz Waryn when he blithely dines in a room littered with the corpses of his recently vanquished nemies – the humor takes the sting out of some very disturbing images indeed.

After Robin wins an archery tournament which turns out to be a trap, he and his men run to the knight's castle for sanctuary, where they are then besieged by the sheriff and his men for forty days and forty nights. The knight, ever the courteous host, assures Robin that they will not lack for feasting and entertainment:

"For one thyng, Robyn, I the behote;  
I swere by Saynt Quynntyne,  
These forty dayes thou wonnest with me,  
To soupe, ete, and dyne."  
Bordes were layde, and clothes were spredde,  
Redely and anone;  
Robyn Hode and his mery men  
To mete can they gone.<sup>473</sup>

In spite of the siege, Robin and his men eat as well as ever, again using feasting to thumb their noses at any other authority or threat. Instead of actively defending the

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<sup>472</sup> See, for example, line 363. Interestingly, the king himself is described in these terms on line 1485. He dresses in disguise as a "fat-headed abbot," and the largeness of his head adds extra verisimilitude to his disguise. Whether this is a joke against the "cumly king" or the church is up for debate, but it certainly places the king in the category of 'prey' for the outlaws, as is his intent.

<sup>473</sup> 1257-1260.

castle, they complacently dine, sending a clear signal to the sheriff that they still have more power than he and are in no way put out by their circumstances.

The final example of feasting centers on King Edward's (we don't know which, but he is described as "oure cumly king," suggesting a literary Edward II) visit in disguise to Robin's camp. The king, exceedingly put out by the outlaws' wholesale slaughter of his deer, decides to infiltrate the camp to establish control over the situation. He is eventually won over by Robin's courtesy and loyalty to the king. When Edward says he is an 'agent of the king,' Robin Hood extends an open invitation to his guest to eat with him and his men. The audience recognizes the irony of this invitation: the meal Robin will serve the king consists entirely of stolen game! Robin Hood then calls his men to him and they come immediately, standing in a military row. The King is impressed, and perhaps a little scared by this display of martial organization:

Here is a wonder semely syght;  
Me thynketh, by Goddes pyne,  
His men are more at his byddynge  
Then my men be at myn.<sup>474</sup>

At this moment the king is entirely in Robin's power; surrounded by the most rigorously-trained soldiers he has seen, and being served a dinner of his own venison. The King has been shown up by Robin's nobility and courtesy, much as the Knight was in the first act. Again, the act of dining is a set-piece that explores the

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<sup>474</sup> 1561-1564.



tensions of the power situation — Robin's providing the king with dinner and entertainment is a challenge to his sovereignty and power. It is a display that makes the king realize that he'd be better off keeping Robin as an ally than making him an enemy.

In conclusion, the *Gest*, although consisting of separate stories, is unified by its absolute preoccupation with the ethics of feasting and table manners. If it is truly a haphazard compilation of disparate Robin Hood ballads, then this could mean that the lost Robin Hood ballads of the late medieval world were far more focused on food than previously has been thought, and this is certainly in line with this study's aim to show the importance of food to the English bestial outlaw tradition. Food is so integral to each one of these stories that I do not believe the compiler could have added them in an attempt to make the work more powerful. Two conclusions can be drawn. Either, A: the *Gest* is a unified work meant to hang together as a whole, either composed by one person or transmitted orally as a unit, or B: a great percentage of Robin Hood ballads focus on feasting, and the compiler of the *Gest* couldn't help but select a number of ballads that center upon feasting, thus serendipitously lending his epic ballad a cohesive structure.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Fowler, who also noted the preponderance of feasting episodes in this narrative, notes: "It is possible, I suppose, to assume that the various Robin Hood ballads 'stitched together' to form the '*Gest*' all simply happened to contain these commonplace eating episodes. But this assumption should not be allowed to obscure the fact that our author has used these scenes with great skill to dramatize the courtesy of Robin Hood's friends and the avarice and cruelty of his enemies," ("Rymes of Robin Hood," 68).

This concern with food, although sublimated into a mock-courtly narrative, still points to one of the central preoccupations of the bestial outlaw tradition: how to procure and consume food while living in exile.

### *Little John*

For many who study this poem, Little John's servitude to the sheriff of Nottingham in fit three seems an abrupt change in tone and genre; Holt calls it "obviously intrusive" and claims that the plot is "wrenched into an entirely new context in the first three stanzas."<sup>476</sup> Although the other fitts seem courtly enough, this one, they claim, descends rapidly into "rough popular comedy." In this section Little John takes on the enigmatic pseudonym 'Reynold Grenelefe,' which resonates with two figures peripheral to the Robin Hood tradition: the Green Man and Reynard the fox of fabular fame. Indeed Little John's adventures do show the intrusion of the forest carnivalesque dynamic into the staid manor setting, and the tricks he plays are certainly reminiscent of Reynard's food-centered exploits. This is another example of the sort of generic collision that seems to have delighted the Greenwood audience, similar to the meeting of Gamelyn and the Outlaw King mentioned earlier in this chapter. Many have noted that later on in the *Gest*, a character separate from Little John named Reynold is listed as one of Robin Hood's

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<sup>476</sup> "We meant to enjoy the rough, popular comedy of the larrikinism of Little John, who is 'licensed' as it were to wreak a kind of carnival 'justice'" says Douglas Gray, "The Robin Hood Poems," 28, and Holt, *Robin Hood*, 23.

men, and they have used this to show that the poem is poorly pasted together. Winnick notes too that the name Reynoldin shows up in a document about the return of Parliament to Wiltshire that contains a list of legendary outlaws, and includes the name of Reynoldyn among the famous band of Robin Hood, Little John, Adam Bell, and others. He concludes that the conflation of Little John with Reynaldine in this section must be a mistake.<sup>477</sup> The character Reynaldine becomes a protagonist of later balladry in his own right, in a series of ballads about a Bluebeard-type trickster fox who abducts women through trickery and takes them to his forest abode only to murder them. It seems likely that the Reynold Grenelefe here is a composite character, a literary joke which acknowledges and plays with the notions of forest misrule contained in the figure of the green man and the often hilarious, yet rapacious, trickiness of the Reynard figure.

Little John is a likely candidate for this kind of generically hybrid play, since he is the more bestial of the two head outlaws in the Greenwood band. He also appears to have amazing powers. While Robin Hood focuses on social climbing and elegantly understated violence, Little John appears to be honing his physical skills, until he is able to run five miles alongside the Sherriff's horse later on in the poem. Although most critics have used the strange running episode on line 723 as a prime example of problems inherent in seaming together separate ballads, it remains as

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<sup>477</sup> Stephen Winick, "A.L. Lloyd and Reynardine: Authenticity and Authorship in the Afterlife of a British Broadside Ballad," *Folklore* 115, no. 3 (2004): 304, n. 11.

likely that Little John is able to run so fast and so far because of the lupine/vulpine context of his outlawry.<sup>478</sup> He is supposed to be especially fleet of foot, and he runs alongside the sheriff much as a dog on a hunt would, which makes perfect sense, for the audience would grasp the irony of the situation immediately. The ballad-master seems to appreciate Little John's feat, and his running five miles seems like more than just a rationalization of the seaming of two separate ballads:

Lytyll Johnn there hym bethought  
On a shrewde wyle;  
Fyve myle in the forest he ran;  
Hym happed all his wyll.  
Than he met the proude sheref,  
Huntynge with houndes and horne.

Little John hunts down the sheriff and finds him; his long run is rewarded with the discovery of his quarry. When the sheriff agrees to come along, the balladeer says: "the sherif rode, and Litell Johnn / Of fote he was full smerte," and this seems like a conscious description of Little John's special powers. Like a hound on a chase, he is leading the Sheriff to his magical quarry, the 'green hart,' which is in fact, his master Robin Hood.

Little John enters the service of the sheriff with the express intent to prey upon him, vowing:

"by my true leutye,

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<sup>478</sup> On this, see for example, Holt, who declares that "the geographic background is real and, for Barnsdale, exact in detail. Sometimes the distance from Barnsdale to Nottingham is covered at an impossible speed, but that arose from the conflation of two traditions which were originally distinct" ("The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood," 57).

I shall be the worst servaunt to hym  
That ever yet had he."

Sure enough, Little John betrays the sheriff's trust in a series of hilarious episodes which are recounted in an earthy style, seen by many as very different from the high-minded behavior of Robin Hood and the Knight. The sheriff has gone hunting, and Little John is lying in bed, listening to his stomach rumble. Little John decides he's had enough, and pays a visit to the kitchens, asking the butler very politely for a midday snack:

"God sir stuarde, I pray to the,  
Gyve me my dynere," saide Litell John.  
"It is longe for Grenelefe  
Fastinge thus for to be;  
Therfor I pray the, sir stuarde,  
Mi dyner gif thou me."

Little John's irritation at being forced to fast for even the shortest periods has, by now, become a running joke. We think back to the opening stanzas of the *Gest*, where Little John's barely restrained impatience at Robin Hood's kingly aspirations. But in Little John's defence, the butler is being 'full uncurteys':

"Shalt thou never ete ne drynke,"  
"Tyll my lorde be come to towne."

As we know, the butler should have known better; as Gamelyn has shown, one ought never to deny a hungry outlaw. So Little John breaks his back nearly in two and enters the kitchen, where "he made large lyveray, (note the pun) Bothe of ale and of wyne." The angered cook, "A stoute man and a bolde," challenges Little John, declaring:

"Thou arte a shrewde hynde  
In ani hous for to dwel,  
For to aske thus to dyne."<sup>479</sup>

The two fight for a long time, and Little John is impressed with the Cook's prowess, so he offers him a job in Robin's 'court'. The cook agrees, and a great feast follows as the two new companions eat like kings from the Sheriff's well-stocked larder.

Thanne he fet to Lytell Johnn,  
The nowmbles of a do,  
Gode brede, and full gode wyne;  
They ete and drank theretoo.  
And when they had dronkyn well,  
Theyre trouthes togeder they plight,  
That they wolde be with Robyn  
That ylke same nyght.<sup>480</sup>

Note again, how food is the locus of both conflict and resolution. Here, too, the characters are preoccupied with the 'right' way to do things: Little John reprimands the Butler for not giving him food when he asks, and the Cook challenges Little John for his treachery in taking food without his lord's permission. Although the tone is mock-epic, the preoccupations are exactly the same as those in the previous and subsequent fits of the *Gest*.

Upon departing for the Greenwood, the Cook and Little John steal all the Sheriff's cooking equipment and serving utensils:

They toke away the silver vessell,  
And all that thei might get;

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<sup>479</sup> 654-656.

<sup>480</sup> 685-692.

Pecis, masars, ne sponis,  
Wolde thei not forget.<sup>481</sup>

The idea of outlaws using silver spoons might seem incongruous and laughable outside the context of the *Gest*: what would such men want spoons for? But in the world of the *Gest*, where we see a turn away from the wildness of the previous outlaw tradition to an emphasis on civility, feasting is of the highest importance, and doing it in style the priority. In this world, which takes almost all the earlier outlaw motifs and refines them to make them more palatable to a changing audience, stealing a man's cook is about the worst thing one can do to him, and taking all the spoons just adds insult to injury. Read in the light of the feast motif, *fitt three* fits in perfectly. Its language does not deviate from the courtly language of the other *fitts*, but rather, maintains it pointedly. Little John swears by his true 'leute', a stock chivalric oath. He also uses elevated language when he asks for food from the butler and when he offers the cook a place in Robin's court. Finally, the battle between Little John and the cook could be read as vulgar slapstick or just as easily in the spirit of heroic literature; here, as in many romance narratives, two evenly matched heroes fight but quickly desist when they recognize each others' merits. They then become fast friends and seal their friendship with a feast. Reading *Fitt Three* in this way shows that it is consistent in style and tone with the rest of the *Gest*, and its preoccupation with food, manners, violence, and feasting is the same. *Fitt Three*

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<sup>481</sup> 697-700.

provides, in fact, the strongest argument in favor of a carefully crafted, unified composition.

### *Conclusion*

As this chapter has made clear, the outlaw legend takes a turn in the in the later Middle Ages, becoming both more complex and more diffuse. Although the heroes can still act in brutal, bestial ways, they can also be refined, chivalrous, and sublimated in action. This is likely due as much to the changes in the English landscape as to changes in literature. Wolves and bears no longer lurk in the dark groves, and indeed, the groves themselves have lost much of their menace and mystery. With this in mind, it makes sense that Robin Hood and his merry men are as likely to be metaphorically represented as deer in this material than they are as wolves. And perhaps this is for the best, for a new age was looking for new heroes, and the noble stag seemed a better mascot for the gentrified hero Robin Hood was quickly becoming. Yet the mascot is not entirely apt; true, the deer too is hunted, but it does not hunt. It is without guile and for the most part helpless against predators. It is a fairly unambiguous symbol of goodness and nobility, while the wolf, as we have seen, inhabits the liminal moral places between good and bad. The deer is no trickster, nor is it an outlaw in the late medieval forest economy, so jokes and tricks involving it are one-liners, at best.



## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

A study that spans 900 years of English literary history is an ambitious project, and one that inevitably results in lacunae and generalizations. Time and necessity have forced me to neglect many medieval texts that I would ultimately bring into the orbit of this survey of the bestial outlaw in English tradition. Scottish freedom fighters like William Wallace and Robert the Bruce populate a corner of my mind, waiting to be spun into future chapters, as do romance heroes like Guy of Warwick, Eustache the Monk, and Sir Gawain. Another iteration of this project would flesh out my analysis of these important figures.

I feel that at least two steps should be taken outside the medieval period as well, to show the relevance of this study beyond the confines of this work's texts and to show the afterlife of this figure in post-medieval narrative. The first would be square in the middle of the Early Modern period, with an analysis of the ballads and plays concerning outlaws. Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is a classic example of an Early Modern reworking of medieval outlaw material, as it borrows its basic storyline from the *Tale of Gamelyn*, and to a lesser extent, from the Robin Hood material, and augments the aspects of classical pastoralism along the way. In Shakespeare's work, *Gamelyn's* elemental brutality is gone, refined into a near-maudlin sentimentality about forest life and outlawry in general which suggests an audience which never experienced the real thing. "But here can we see no enemy but winter and rough weather" certainly assumes no danger from wild beasts or from

bestial hunters of men, and ‘Melancholy Jacques’ histrionic sobbing over and identification with a felled deer is a long way from Little John’s “spare no venison.” Of course, this is Shakespeare’s highly stylized utopian forest, Northrop Frye’s famous ‘Green World,’ but it is drawing upon the medieval outlaw tradition in many ways, and Shakespeare’s description of the natural world, if sentimental, can also be very attuned to natural and even biological detail. So we can conclude that the native outlaw tradition has truly lost its bite in the Early Modern imagination, as the forests seem to hold no dark mystery. They may still be filled with highwaymen, but no wolves, or wolfish men, lurk in their interior, and the savage waste of the Anglo-Saxon exile poems is no longer even a memory.

In England’s colonies, however, the story is very different. In India, Australia, Canada, America, Africa, and anywhere else the British Empire subdues, alpha predators are quickly being hunted down and destroyed, as are any resistant aborigines, in countless reiterations of the wolf- and giant hunts we saw in the Anglo-Saxon and Post-Conquest periods. In America, the North American plains Indians attack settlers as part of wolfish warrior cults, and even white outsiders like Jeremiah Johnson become identified with the basic archetypal bestial hero — cannibalism, monstrous rages, monster-killing, shapeshifting, and most other things as well.

The outlaw hero of the American frontier is as cruel, savage and problematic as Hereward, Gamelyn, or even Guy of Guisbourne, and his Native counterpart is a bogeyman, whose acts of rapine are made for late-night storytelling. The ballads and

narratives dealing with these figures are dark and savage, full of brutality and perdition. But in Hollywood, feature film after feature film about Robin Hood is being made, and they all feature an imagined English forest as benign and open as any great lord's park, partly to emphasize the rapacity and wolfishness of the bad 'Prince John' and his cronies, but partly because the safe cultured England of the American imagination does not suffer from the same kinds of animal/outlaw problems as the American West – nor could it ever have. England was never (in the eyes of the filmmakers) the wild, vast, culturally diverse, and untamed landscape America remains even today in a few places. So, at the same time, the American imagination holds the two main types of outlawry in their imagination. Both function successfully as national myth and as ways of understanding wild spaces, but they perform very different functions. An expanded dissertation would fill out the outlines of this argument.

But in conclusion of today's project, I hope that this exploration of the figure of the 'bestly' outlaw in medieval England has shown the unbroken line of 'bestly' heritage which arguably stretches from the migration period to today. The notion of bestial outlawry is one of the most widespread and fundamental motifs in English literature, and it has come through history pretty much intact, in spite of the great cultural and environmental pressures placed on it. In the outlaw narratives, in the great poems of exile in the Anglo-Saxon period, the great lordly struggles of the post-Conquest era, and the hilarious and intense balladry of the late medieval Greenwood, we begin to see an overarching narrative of the interaction between the

English countryside and its inhabitants. It is a wild, melancholy, uneven story, but it is powerful nonetheless.

## APPENDIX:

### Johny Cock

Johny he has risen up i the morn,  
Calls for water to wash his hands;  
But little knew he that his bloody hounds  
Were bound in iron bands. bands  
Were bound in iron bands  
Johny's mother has gotten word o that,  
And care-bed she has taen:  
'O Johny, for my benison,  
I beg you'l stay at hame;  
For the wine so red, and the well baken bread,  
My Johny shall want nane.  
'There are seven forsters at Pickeram Side,  
At Pickeram where they dwell,  
And for a drop of thy heart's bluid  
They wad ride the fords of hell.'  
Johny he's gotten word of that,  
And he's turnd wondrous keen;  
He's put off the red scarlett,  
And he's put on the Lincoln green.  
With a sheaf of arrows by his side,  
And a bent bow in his hand,  
He's mounted on a prancing steed,  
And he has ridden fast oer the strand.  
He's up i Braidhouplee, and down i Bradyslee,  
And under a buss o broom,  
And there he found a good dun deer,  
Feeding in a buss of ling.  
Johny shot, and the dun deer lap,  
And she lap wondrous wide,  
Until they came to the wan water,  
And he stemd her of her pride.  
He 'as taen out the little pen-knife,  
'Twas full three quarters long,  
And he has taen out of that dun deer  
The liver bot and the tongue.  
They eat of the flesh, and they drank of the blood,  
And the blood it was so sweet,  
Which caused Johny and his bloody hounds  
To fall in a deep sleep.  
By then came an old palmer,

And an ill death may he die!  
 For he's away to Pickram Side,  
 As fast as he can drie.  
 'What news, what news?' says the Seven Forsters,  
 'What news have ye brought to me?'  
 'I have noe news,' the palmer said,  
 'But what I saw with my eye.  
 'High up i Bradyslee, low down i Bradisslee,  
 And under a buss of scroggs,  
 O there I spied a well-wight man,  
 Sleeping among his dogs.  
 'His coat it was of light Lincoln,  
 And his breeches of the same,  
 His shoes of the American leather,  
 And gold buckles tying them.'  
 Up bespake the Seven Forsters,  
 Up bespake they ane and a':  
 O that is Johny o Cockleys Well,  
 And near him we will draw.  
 O the first y stroke that they gae him,  
 They struck him off by the knee;  
 Then up bespake his sister's son:  
 'O the next 'll gar him die!'  
 'O some they count ye well-wight men,  
 But I do count ye nane;  
 For you might well ha wakend me,  
 And askd gin I wad be taen.  
 'The wildest wolf in aw this wood  
 Wad not ha done so by me;  
 She'd ha wet her foot ith wan water,  
 And sprinkled it oer my brae,  
 And if that wad not ha wakend me,  
 She wad ha gone and let me be.  
 'O bows of yew, if ye be true,  
 In London, where ye were bought,  
 Fingers five, get up belive,  
 Manhuid shall fail me nought.'  
 He has killd the Seven Forsters,  
 He has killd them all but ane,  
 And that wan scarce to Pickeram Side,  
 To carry the bode-words hame.  
 'Is there never a boy in a' this wood  
 That will tell what I can say;

That will go to Cockleys Well,  
Tell my mither to fetch me away?  
There was a boy into that wood,  
That carried the tidings away,  
And many ae was the well-wight man  
At the fetching o Johny away.

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